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POUR L'ÉTUDE DU GÉNOCIDE DES ARMÉNIENS

Le génocide des Arméniens

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Illustration de couverture : *Des Arméniens du Musa Dagh ayant échappé aux massacres perpétrés par les Turcs sont recueillis à bord d'un croiseur français au nord de Latakia en septembre 1915 (Syrie)*

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Avant-propos

Organisé par le Conseil scientifique international pour l'étude du génocide des Arméniens (CSI), le colloque de Paris (25 au 28 mars 2015) se déroulant à la Sorbonne, au Mémorial de la Shoah, à l'École de hautes études en sciences sociales et à la Bibliothèque nationale de France² analyse cent ans de recherche sur le premier génocide contemporain. Il s'agit de la manifestation la plus importante en France pour le centenaire de 1915, ouverte par le président de la République. Cette rencontre scientifique de haut niveau atteste de l'investissement dans la connaissance d'une large communauté de chercheurs travaillant dans le monde entier – y compris en Turquie malgré les risques encourus. La proposition a été faite aux participants du colloque de publier leur communication en avant-première. L'ensemble de ces contributions constitue une approche à la fois synthétique et approfondie de la recherche sur le génocide des Arméniens. Ce savoir s'adresse aussi bien à la communauté scientifique soucieuse de bilans critiques et de nouvelles problématiques, qu'aux opinions publiques intéressées par la compréhension des génocides et l'enjeu de leur prévention. En étudiant le premier génocide contemporain, l'ouvrage présente l'ère des génocides et des violences de masse qu'a constitué le xx^e siècle. L'ambition est élevée, à la mesure de la signification heuristique du centenaire de 1915 en France et dans le monde.

Les contributions sont rédigées dans les deux langues de travail du colloque, le français et l'anglais.

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Partie I

Les étapes du processus génocidaire

1

L'opposition ottomane, le Comité Union et Progrès et la révolution de 1908

Erdal Kaynar (Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem/Cetobac, Paris)

Introduction

Peu d'événements ont autant changé l'histoire de l'Empire ottoman que la révolution de 1908. La révolution jeune-turque mit fin au régime du sultan Abdülhamid II et sonna le début d'une nouvelle ère. La surveillance, l'exil, l'étouffement des libertés, la violence interethnique – tout cela semblait promis à appartenir aux temps désormais révolus de l'ancien régime du sultan autocrate. L'Empire ottoman était devenu le pays des libertés, régi par le principe du constitutionnalisme. Pour autant, la liesse ne dura pas longtemps. Une succession de crises diplomatiques et internes s'accompagna d'une lutte de pouvoir engagée par le Comité Union et Progrès (CUP) en tant que principale organisation jeune-turque ayant fomenté le renversement du régime hamidien. À la lumière de l'histoire politique tumultueuse de la Seconde période constitutionnelle, 1908 peut apparaître comme simple coup d'État perpétré par le CUP dans le dessein de s'accaparer le pouvoir, et comme un événement ayant finalement mené à la dissolution de l'Empire ottoman et la fondation de la République de Turquie en tant que successeur principal de l'État ottoman. La révolution jeune-turque serait alors entièrement « jeune-turque ». Mais cela reviendrait à vouloir donner un sens unique à un événement qui en est dépourvu.

Comme chaque événement révolutionnaire, 1908 porte une multiplicité qui défie les tentatives d'interprétation téléologique. L'expression « l'ivresse de la liberté », fréquemment utilisée à l'été 1908, décrit ce moment exceptionnel de l'histoire ottomane, lorsque l'issue de la révolution parut grand

ouverte¹. Une des raisons principales de cette « ivresse » fut, précisément, le fait que l'événement échappa au contrôle d'un seul groupe. Les scènes d'embrassades, de fraternisation et de grande joie se répandirent des Balkans à l'ensemble du territoire ottoman et attestent d'un engouement général pour la révolution « jeune-turque ». La révolution fut portée par des expériences et des espoirs divers se traduisant dans des attentes divergentes et souvent contradictoires concernant la période constitutionnelle. C'est dans ce contexte d'indécision que le CUP engagea une lutte de pouvoir pour faire valoir sa vision de la révolution, de la constitution et de l'Empire ottoman. En tenant compte de ce caractère hétéroclite de 1908, il importe de s'arrêter sur les rapports entre les Jeunes-Turcs et d'autres groupes de l'opposition ottomane pour pouvoir évaluer le rôle du CUP dans le processus de la révolution et mieux comprendre les conflits politiques de la Seconde période constitutionnelle².

La multiplicité de l'opposition anti-hamidiennne et la contradiction de la philosophie politique ottomane

Le mouvement jeune-turc eut des débuts modestes dans les écoles publiques de la capitale ottomane à partir de 1889. Avant de devenir un groupe politique à portée nationale, les Jeunes-Turcs furent en effet un mouvement d'étudiants. Or, ces premières cellules jeunes-turques eurent une importance symbolique, car elles reflétaient un processus de politisation au sein de la jeunesse ottomane mécontente du gouvernement d'Abdülhamid II. En révoquant le Parlement ottoman en 1878, le sultan avait mis fin à la première expérience démocratique inaugurée par la déclaration de la Constitution ottomane en 1876. Pendant plus d'une décennie, Abdülhamid avait pu établir un pouvoir souverain absolu et régner à l'écart de tout contrôle politique. Mais son régime autocrate subit des fissures. Aux yeux de différentes couches de la population ottomane, son règne se présenta comme une faillite et comme un anachronisme aux temps du progrès universel. C'est ce mécontentement qui permit le développement du mouvement jeune-turc.

Ayant bénéficié d'une formation moderne, les Jeunes-Turcs faisaient preuve d'une compréhension théorique de leur existence et de leur rôle dans le monde de la fin du XIX^e siècle. Leur philosophie politique se composait ainsi d'une pensée marquée par un scientisme rigoureux inspiré de la tradition française positiviste et du matérialisme vulgaire, couplée à une perception de leur temps en termes social-darwinistes, et de la conviction qu'il fallait agir pour sauver l'Empire ottoman de sa disparition.

Au cours des années 1890, ils élargirent leur base et s'établirent dans des villes d'exil, en particulier Genève, Le Caire et Paris³. Mais c'est en 1895 qu'ils se constituèrent en comité politique, c'est-à-dire au moment où

l'Empire connut l'une de pires crises de son existence. Des massacres dans les provinces orientales créèrent une situation d'insécurité dans laquelle la légitimité de l'État était sérieusement mise en cause dans l'ensemble de l'Empire. Prétextant la situation dans l'est du pays, les grandes puissances reprirent leurs visées sur les territoires ottomans et exercèrent tout au long de l'année des pressions diplomatiques dans lesquelles la partition de l'Empire ottoman n'était pas exclue⁴. Confrontés à l'apparent échec de la politique hamidienne, les Jeunes-Turcs décidèrent de s'établir publiquement sur la scène politique ottomane comme des adversaires du régime autocrate. À l'été 1895, ils fondèrent le CUP en tant qu'organisation principale du mouvement et commencèrent à la fin de l'année à publier des journaux pour donner une forme reconnaissable à leur politique.

Si les Jeunes-Turcs s'établirent comme la voix de la contestation du régime, on ne peut attribuer à eux seuls la formation d'une politique anti-hamidienne. De fait, au moment de leur percée en 1895, l'opposition au régime hamidien était déjà établie, en particulier auprès des élites politiques des populations non-musulmanes. Le sultan essaya d'éviter toute progression dans la question arménienne par peur d'une perte de souveraineté de l'État ottoman et mit en place une politique systématique visant à exaspérer les tensions interethniques en privilégiant des tribus kurdes afin d'agir contre l'expression politique arménienne. En raison du décalage entre la vision de l'État ottoman et les attentes de la population arménienne, de nouveaux groupes politiques émergèrent qui se faisaient les porte-parole de leur population et allaient jouer un rôle important dans l'histoire politique ottomane. Les créations les plus importantes furent celles du parti social-démocrate arménien Hintchak en 1887, ainsi que de la Fédération révolutionnaire arménienne (FRA – Dachnaksoutioun) en 1890. Au cours des années 1890, ils firent de la situation des Arméniens ottomans la priorité de leur politique. Toutefois, leurs revendications dépassaient bien une orientation nationaliste exclusive et se faisaient dans le cadre national de l'Empire ottoman. Les comités ciblaient directement le sultan et dénonçaient sa mauvaise gestion du pays comme la véritable cause de la détresse des peuples ottomans et de la violence. Abdülhamid étant tenu responsable de la dégradation des rapports entre les communautés, sa déposition se présenta alors comme la condition d'un nouveau départ de l'Empire ottoman.

Pour autant, cette orientation des comités arméniens n'empêcha pas les contemporains d'attribuer le développement de l'opposition au sultan Abdülhamid à la naissance du mouvement jeune-turc. Avant même que les Jeunes-Turcs n'aient pris une structure identifiable dans la forme du CUP, ils reçurent une reconnaissance auprès de la presse de différents pays européens qui les identifiaient comme la force libérale anti-hamidienne de l'Empire ottoman. Cette perception était surtout fermement ancrée auprès

des autorités ottomanes qui considéraient la constitution des Jeunes-Turcs comme une menace sérieuse au régime existant. Or, ce ne fut pas un hasard si les Jeunes-Turcs purent s'établir comme l'incarnation de l'opposition contre le sultan au détriment d'autres groupes politiques. La raison principale paraît simple : en tant que groupe composé de musulmans, les Jeunes-Turcs jouissaient d'un statut, voire d'une légitimité, qui faisait défaut aux comités des populations chrétiennes aux yeux de l'État ottoman et aussi des pays européens.

Traditionnellement, la structure du pouvoir ottoman avait privilégié les musulmans et plus particulièrement les Turcs sur lesquels l'autorité politique et militaire de l'État reposait principalement. Une série de réformes légales et administratives depuis Mahmud II et les *Tanzimat* inaugura un programme important de rupture avec cette tradition. Inspirées des valeurs séculières dérivées des principes des Droits de l'homme, ces réformes visaient à établir un système politique moderne basé sur le principe d'égalité entre tous les citoyens masculins de l'Empire ottoman. Cependant, l'idéal de créer une citoyenneté bourgeoise abstraite se heurta à l'incapacité de l'élite politique de s'affranchir de la disposition traditionnelle du pouvoir qui continua alors à définir l'organisation de l'État. Par conséquent, en contradiction avec l'orientation d'égalité stipulée, les Turcs continuèrent à revêtir un statut particulier dans l'imaginaire de l'élite politique ottomane ainsi qu'au sein de l'administration étatique, dans laquelle ils étaient très largement surreprésentés. En même temps, l'islam fut toujours un pilier crucial de l'État dont le sultan renforça même l'importance par le lancement d'une nouvelle politique islamique pour consolider son pouvoir à la suite de la guerre russo-turque de 1877-1878 qui avait laissé l'Empire ottoman pour la première fois dans son histoire avec une nette majorité musulmane.

Cette contradiction de la philosophie politique ottomane marquait d'une façon essentielle la perception de l'opposition jeune-turque auprès des autorités hamidiennes. Comparée à la menace que représentaient les comités macédoniens et arméniens qui disposaient d'une organisation plus établie et d'une idéologie plus radicale à tendance socialiste, la formation d'un mouvement jeune-turc pouvait paraître bénigne. Cependant, les Jeunes-Turcs étaient issus des couches qui représentaient la base traditionnelle du pouvoir ottoman et recrutaient leurs sympathisants au sein de ces mêmes couches. C'est pourquoi le choc pour le régime fut plus grand concernant la montée de l'opposition jeune-turque.

Cela avait des effets très concrets sur la politique jeune-turque. Pour commencer, il faut souligner que la répression de leurs activités était beaucoup plus clémentine que celle que subissaient les comités non-musulmans. Tandis que les révolutionnaires macédoniens ou arméniens étaient rapidement identifiés comme des ennemis de l'État, le sultan développa une politique

complexe de punition et de récompense vis-à-vis des Jeunes-Turcs qui reprenait des formes traditionnelles de coercition et d'intégration. D'une part, il recourut massivement à l'exil, éloignant des opposants du centre du pouvoir et les déracinant de leurs réseaux. D'autre part, il essaya d'acheter les faveurs des opposants jeunes-turcs en leur proposant des rémunérations, parfois très importantes, ou des postes au sein de la bureaucratie de l'État. Cette politique à double détente aboutissait à un jeu vicieux dans lequel le sultan finançait de fait sa propre opposition – au point de créer la stupeur auprès des diplomates européens.

Si le sultan put jouer ce jeu, c'est aussi à cause de l'identification avec l'État que les Jeunes-Turcs maintenaient en dépit de leur hostilité à l'égard du sultan. Majoritairement, ils avaient connu une mobilité sociale grâce aux institutions de l'État et croyaient donc que leur propre sort serait lié à celui de l'État dont ils se considéraient l'élite naturelle. Il en résultait une proximité avec les institutions étatiques qui leur donnaient un avantage structurel sur d'autres comités politiques. Effectivement, les Jeunes-Turcs furent capables de tisser des liens avec les mécontents de l'administration publique ainsi qu'au sein de l'armée ottomane, leur permettant de s'établir sur le long terme un réseau de sympathisants dans les circuits officiels.

À la recherche d'une alliance de l'opposition ottomane

Ces différences structurelles entre les Jeunes-Turcs et les autres comités d'opposition se traduisent dans des priorités et des orientations différentes concernant en particulier la question du centralisme de l'Empire ottoman. Toutefois, l'hostilité à l'égard du sultan pouvait pousser les comités politiques à faire abstraction de leurs visées respectives pour essayer de trouver un lieu commun de l'opposition anti-hamidiennne. Le langage politique jeune-turc portait les premières traces d'un turquisme qui considérait systématiquement les Turcs comme le véritable pilier de l'Empire ottoman. Mais cette pensée était en même temps couplée à l'idéal ottomaniste qui appelait à l'égalité et à la fraternité entre tous les peuples de l'Empire à l'opposé de l'état des rapports intercommunautaires sous Abdülhamid, marqués par la violence et la méfiance réciproque. De même, à travers l'appel à la restauration de la Constitution ottomane de 1876 qui devint leur revendication-phare dès 1895, les Jeunes-Turcs purent définir un idéal reconnaissable et bien identifiable qui pouvait potentiellement permettre le ralliement des autres comités politiques. Ainsi, les treize années précédant la révolution jeune-turque furent rythmées par des initiatives d'alliance. Les premiers contacts s'établirent avant même la fondation officielle du CUP en mai 1895 entre la tête des Jeunes-Turcs à Paris Ahmed Rıza et le parti Hintchak. Mais c'est le parti Dachnak qui s'imposa dès l'année suivante comme l'interlocuteur

principal des Jeunes-Turcs, grâce notamment à son implantation dans les provinces orientales qu'il poursuivait dans un but d'autodéfense des paysans arméniens exposés à la violence des brigades kurdes.

En dépit des bonnes volontés réciproques, deux raisons principales empêchaient la réalisation d'une entente. Des querelles constantes entre les différentes factions jeunes-turques et un manque d'engagement pour établir une structure organisationnelle durable rendaient le mouvement largement inefficace et empêchaient la formulation d'une politique d'opposition pragmatique. Mais surtout, les divergences politiques par rapport à l'orientation centraliste des Jeunes-Turcs s'avérèrent largement infranchissables. Les comités arméniens demandaient des réformes spécifiques dans les provinces orientales pour obtenir des améliorations immédiates pour la population concernée et n'excluaient pas de recourir au soutien des grandes puissances pour pousser à des changements. Quant aux Jeunes-Turcs, ils refusaient catégoriquement toute réforme particulière et présentaient la réforme générale de l'Empire dans la forme de l'établissement d'un régime constitutionnel comme le seul but légitime de l'activité révolutionnaire ottomane.

Pendant des années, cette intransigeance maintint les rapports entre les Jeunes-Turcs et les comités arméniens au point mort. Un changement se produisit dans les années 1900 par l'initiative de Prens Sabahaddin, neveu du sultan Abdülhamid qui rejoignit l'opposition jeune-turque en 1900. À l'opposé du centralisme autoritaire de la majorité des Jeunes-Turcs, Sabahaddin faisait valoir une vision plus libérale et décentralisée de l'Empire ottoman. En 1902, il organisa le congrès de Libéraux ottomans pour réunir les factions jeunes-turques espérant donner un nouvel élan à l'opposition ottomane. Le résultat fut l'inverse de ce qu'il avait prévu et le mouvement jeune-turc qui, en dépit des disputes constantes avait su garder son unité, se divisa en deux fractions. L'une sous Prens Sabahaddin, manifestant une orientation plus libérale et une bienveillance vis-à-vis de la politique des grandes puissances ; l'autre guidée par Ahmed Rıza, mettant en valeur le principe de la souveraineté de l'État ottoman et ayant une tendance plus nationaliste turque.

Les positions du premier se présentaient évidemment comme plus compatibles avec le programme des comités arméniens. Mais de fait, ce ne fut qu'à partir de 1905 que Sabahaddin chercha à développer une véritable coopération avec des groupes arméniens, en particulier la FRA. Au fond, il avait une approche principalement instrumentaliste des comités arméniens. La visée principale de sa politique fut de gagner le soutien des grandes puissances et en particulier de l'Angleterre à sa cause jeune-turque afin de renverser le régime hamidien par une intervention étrangère. Dans ce contexte, le rapprochement avec les Arméniens s'imposa à lui par les rapports privilégiés qu'ils étaient supposés entretenir avec les pays européens. D'après son

jugement, une collaboration avec les comités arméniens fut ainsi une étape obligatoire pour atteindre le but principal de sa politique jeune-turque.

En dépit de cette perception biaisée, l'initiative de Sabahaddin eut néanmoins un rôle crucial. Pour la première fois, une collaboration entre les Jeunes-Turcs et les comités arméniens devint possible. Le Dachnaksoutioun accepta la main tendue et commença à collaborer avec les Jeunes-Turcs guidés par Sabahaddin et son organisation Ligue pour l'Initiative Privée et la Décentralisation visant à répandre des idées d'unité et d'action révolutionnaire auprès de la population musulmane des provinces orientales. Défiant le système de surveillance et de censure du régime hamidien, la FRA éditait des tracts et des journaux turcs et bilingues sur le territoire ottoman même pour les distribuer à travers ses réseaux aux Arméniens et aux musulmans. En conséquence, le mécontentement populaire concernant des conditions économiques aggravées par des impôts excessifs et de mauvaises récoltes commença à s'exprimer dans un langage politique constitutionnaliste et anti-régime, comme on le voit dans une série d'émeutes qui éclatèrent en Anatolie centrale et orientale entre 1905 et 1908. Bien avant le début de la rébellion guidée par les Jeunes-Turcs dans les Balkans, des manifestations demandant le rétablissement de la Constitution se produisirent en Anatolie de l'Est grâce au travail du Dachnaksoutioun⁵.

Les activités dans les provinces orientales démontrèrent le potentiel que pouvait offrir l'alliance des différents comités de l'opposition ottomane. Elles firent aussi la preuve de l'importance de disposer d'une organisation politique pour définir une stratégie révolutionnaire efficace. Si le groupe de Prens Sabahaddin avait initié la collaboration avec les Arméniens, celle-ci fut déséquilibrée, car elle reposait essentiellement sur le réseau structurel de la FRA, tandis que la question de l'organisation fut au mieux secondaire pour Sabahaddin. Finalement, ce fut la faction autour d'Ahmed Rıza qui saisit l'importance de l'organisation politique et réalisa un changement de cap. Ainsi, elle commença à se doter dès 1906 d'une organisation centralisée efficace qui permit le développement d'une politique de renversement coordonnée. Au bout d'une courte période, le mouvement, reconstitué en CUP, s'établit comme une force majeure dans les Balkans où il put infiltrer l'armée et l'administration.

L'un des volets de cette réorganisation fut la recherche d'un accord entre les différents groupes de l'opposition ottomane. Ainsi le CUP afficha un langage d'unité qui, en apparence, était affranchi de l'animosité envers l'expression politique des comités non-musulmans et approcha Sabahaddin et la FRA. L'alliance se concrétisa au congrès des Partis de l'opposition ottomane qui convint à Paris fin 1907, sur l'invitation des représentants des trois comités-phares : Prens Sabahaddin, Ahmed Rıza et Khatchatur Malumian (Aknuni). Inspiré de l'exemple de la collaboration en Anatolie de l'Est et au

risque de froisser d'autres comités arméniens, le Dachnaksoutioun mit de côté son propre programme pour se mettre d'accord sur l'objectif du renversement du régime d'Abdülhamid et l'établissement d'un régime constitutionnel. Aknuni déclara solennellement que les participants du congrès allaient se retrouver à Constantinople avec le rétablissement de la liberté sous dix-huit mois.

La révolution et après

La réorganisation du CUP fut fortement inspirée par les activités révolutionnaires des comités non-musulmans. Cependant, sa politique d'infiltrer les institutions de l'État rendit la lutte révolutionnaire à l'instar de ces comités, ou la coopération avec des alliés, en fin de compte secondaires. Début juillet 1908, le CUP lança une révolte militaire à Monastir/Bitola qui se répandit dans l'ensemble de la province macédonienne. Confiant dans la force qu'il avait gagnée, le Comité déclara le 23 juillet 1908 le rétablissement de la Constitution ottomane. Sous la menace de la 3^e armée ottomane de marcher sur Istanbul, le sultan n'eut pas d'autre choix que d'accepter un fait accompli.

Dans le déroulement des événements, le rôle des organisations autres que le CUP paraît minime. Cependant, le succès de la révolte n'aurait pu se réaliser sans le travail des comités arméniens et macédoniens qui contribuèrent à relayer des idées constitutionnalistes et à saper l'autorité du régime hamidien. En toute logique, ils devinrent une partie intégrante de la révolution et du nouvel esprit qui régna dans l'Empire. Les fameux *komitadjis* des Balkans, qui avaient mené la lutte contre l'État ottoman et s'étaient souvent battus à mort entre eux-mêmes, déposèrent les armes pour prêter allégeance à la constitution ottomane. Les organisations arméniennes devinrent des partis officiels et reconnus de la vie politique ottomane, tandis qu'elles devaient continuer à opérer dans l'illégalité en Russie. Le lieu pour résoudre la question arménienne fut désormais le Parlement ottoman et non plus les concertations intéressées des puissances européennes. C'est pour cela aussi que les partis arméniens furent les organisations probablement les plus favorables à la Constitution⁶.

Le rôle que le CUP avait joué dans le renversement du régime hamidien lui garantissait une place prépondérante dans la politique post-révolutionnaire. Son image de comité ayant orchestré la révolution sans trop de débordements lui donna un statut particulier que même ses adversaires devaient respecter. Il put renouveler son image de gardien de la Constitution en avril 1909, lorsqu'il arriva à mobiliser l'armée ottomane contre une insurrection contre-révolutionnaire à Istanbul.

Cependant, son véritable pouvoir provenait de son organisation politique. Dès août 1908, le CUP se mit à établir un réseau de clubs unionistes dans l'ensemble du territoire ottoman. De même, il poursuivit sa politique d'implantation au sein des institutions de l'État et en particulier au sein de l'armée. Cette politique donna au CUP un net avantage sur d'autres formations politiques de la Seconde période constitutionnelle qui n'arrivaient pas à mettre en place une organisation comparable à l'échelle nationale. Pour le CUP, l'existence d'un réseau officieux capable d'influer sur la politique fut une nécessité pour mettre fin au caractère indécis de la révolution et garantir la pérennité du régime constitutionnel contre ses adversaires intérieurs et extérieurs⁷.

Or, si le Comité présenta cette approche comme un pragmatisme imposé par le souci de *realpolitik*, elle ne peut être dissociée de son orientation idéologique autoritaire. Effectivement, le CUP revendiqua d'une façon exclusive le droit de définir la direction politique que l'Empire ottoman avait à suivre en cas d'urgence et de danger et fut prêt à suspendre les mécanismes parlementaires lorsqu'il le jugea nécessaire. Dans la lutte de pouvoir qu'il engagea pour réaliser cette politique, l'expression des visions différentes ne représenta pas uniquement une divergence, mais une mise en cause de la seule politique ottomane légitime. Sous cet angle, des revendications politiques de la part des groupes non-musulmans devinrent des menaces existentielles pour l'Empire ottoman et la structure du pouvoir existant. Malgré l'alliance entre les Jeunes-Turcs et les Arméniens et la contribution essentielle des groupes non-musulmans à l'idéal constitutionnaliste, la compréhension unioniste de cet idéal resta finalement ancrée dans la contradiction essentielle de la philosophie politique ottomane du XIX^e siècle que les anciens Jeunes-Turcs n'arrivaient pas à dépasser.

Young Turk Decision Making Patterns 1913-1915

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In the absence of documentary evidence we may never know exactly how, when and by whom the decisions on the Armenian deportations and, even more importantly, the decisions on a “final solution” of the Armenian problem were taken. We may, however, get some idea of how the decision making process may have unfolded by looking at the way the leadership of the Committee of Union and Progress acted on *other* occasions when it had to take crucial decisions. This is what I propose to do in this article. By looking at a number of very important decisions taken roughly in the same period, on which we do have documentary evidence, I will try to answer the question whether we can discern a pattern. In other words : whether there is a typical way in which the Unionists reached decisions and instigated action.

For this purpose I will first review the state of the art on the decision making process that between October 1914 and May 1915 led to the decision to deport the Armenians of Anatolia to the Syrian desert. Next, the evidence on the decision to use these deportations for mass killings will be reviewed. The comparison of these processes will be with four other cases in which the Unionist leadership took a really major decision : the coup d'état of January 1913 (the so-called “Raid on the Sublime Porte”), the expulsion of the Greek Orthodox (*Rum*) from the Aegean coastal regions in June 1914, the conclusion of the treaty of alliance with Germany in August 1914 and the decision actually to go to war by attacking the Russian fleet in October 1914.

The analysis of the decision making process on the Armenians in 1914-15 is based on a review of three of the most important recent works on the Armenian genocide, Taner Akçam's *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity*, Donald Bloxham's *The Great Game of Genocide* and Fuat Dündar's *Modern Türkiye*

Şifresi [The Code of Modern Turkey]. Of course, Raymond Kévorkian's meticulous study of the genocide, *Le génocide des Arméniens*, is equally important, but it focuses on the execution of the genocide rather than on its planning.

The picture that emerges from these works that, taken together, may be said to represent the state of the art in the field, is as follows. The leadership of the Committee of Union and Progress lost its faith in collaboration with the Armenians, particularly with the Dashnaks (with whom they had good relations before 1914) due to two events. The first of these was the refusal of the Armenian organizations to reject foreign interference in the question of reforms in the "Armenian" provinces. The fact that the Armenians supported the German-Russian compromise that led to the establishment of two inspectorates-general with a Norwegian and a Dutch inspector at the top and a brief to execute far-reaching reforms was seen by the CUP as treason. For the CUP leaders it was reminiscent of the arrangement that had been imposed in Macedonia under Austrian and Russian pressure a decade before. In their eyes, this had ultimately led to the loss of Macedonia, the homeland of the majority of the Unionist leaders and the cradle of their organization.

The second event, and the one that is seen as the cause of the definitive parting of the ways of CUP and Dashnakzutiun, is the decision on the Dashnak congress in Erzurum in August 1914 to remain neutral in the event of a Russo-Ottoman war. This meant a refusal of the proposal of Dr Bahaettin Şakır (who attended the conference as CUP observer) to work together for the "liberation" of the Caucasus. Under this scheme the Dashnaks were to have organized a revolt in Russian Transcaucasia in exchange for Ottoman recognition of Armenian autonomy after the war. The refusal of the Armenians seems to have infuriated Bahaettin Şakır.

After the outbreak of war on the 31 st of October, measures were taken in the areas behind the front in the east : private telegraph machines were confiscated and missionaries were banned from the area. Apparently the issue of more comprehensive measures against the Armenians was on the agenda, as documents from November already refer to measures that are taken "pending a decision on this matter"¹.

The matter gained urgency in the eyes of the CUP leadership after the defeats at Sarıkamış (January) and on the Suez Canal (2-3 February). The defeats instilled great fear among the Unionists of a combined Russian and British operation supported by Armenians from the inside. The Unionist nightmare consisted of a Russian drive from the northeast (as soon as the roads would clear in spring) through the areas of Van, Bitlis, Muş and Harput with their large Armenian populations, synchronized with British landings in the Iskenderun/Dörtyol area, which would be supported by the Armenian population in Cilicia. If successful, such a campaign would cut the Ottoman Empire in half. The plan for a British landing combined with an Armenian

uprising was rejected by Kitchener, but the CUP knew that Armenian committees abroad had pleaded with the British and offered their support. The British-French naval campaign that aimed to break through the Dardanelles (5-18 March 1915) of course increased anxiety among the Unionist leadership. In late winter there were continuous small-scale skirmishes with Armenian bands, most of which seem to have consisted of deserters from the army. In this atmosphere of anxiety the CUP started to broadcast news about the dangers of a general Armenian revolt throughout February and March².

In February Cemal Pasha started a fairly large-scale (4 000 troops) military campaign against rebels in and around the mountain town of Zeytun in the eastern Taurus mountain range, which was a favourite refuge for deserters and was seen as a key strategic location if the Russian-British plan would become a reality. Cemal was strengthened in his resolve to stamp out the danger of any Armenian rebellion when interior minister (and CUP chief) Talât Bey sent him encouraging cables from Istanbul³.

February is also the month when, on the orders of war minister Enver Pasha, Armenian soldiers were disarmed, put into labour battalions and removed from the headquarters of army units⁴. On 25 February the army commanders were given powers to take all measures they deemed necessary⁵.

In March there were local deportations both on the eastern front and in Cilicia (where Armenians were removed from the vicinity of the railway lines). These seem to have been the result primarily of local initiatives. Regional agents of the CUP were clamouring for action throughout March. The first major deportation was that of the Armenian population of Dörtüyl on the Mediterranean coast, followed by a decision on 8 April to deport the whole Armenian community of Zeytun. The routes of both of these deportations were to the northwest, in the direction of Konya province, rather than in the direction of the Syrian desert. Halfway through April *muhacirs*, refugees from the Balkans and Italian-occupied Tripolitania, were resettled in these locations. It was around this time that Talât told ambassador Morgenthau that the deportations were the result of extensive deliberations within the committee⁶. This seems to be confirmed by the reports that Enver, Talât and Cemal had an intensive exchange of cables on the issue all through April⁷.

On 24 April, the day most widely remembered for the mass arrests among the Armenian elite in Istanbul, the columns of deportees heading for Konya were suddenly redirected towards the Syrian desert. Two days later a temporary law on the confiscation of weapons was passed. Weapons searches, either out of true concern or as a pretext, would play an important role in the early phase of the persecution of Armenians in places like Diyarbakır.

On 2 May 1915, Colonel İsmet [İnönü] of the Third Army headquarters sent a request to Istanbul, in which he pointed out that there were widespread

insurrections in the rear of the army and in which he requested that the Armenian population be either extradited to Russia or deported to inner Anatolia. İsmet expressed a preference for the former option. This advice was acted upon, albeit not according to his preference. One week later the deportation of the Armenians from Van, Bitlis and Erzurum provinces to the south was ordered⁸. Two weeks after that, on 23 May, the deportation of all Armenians from the eastern border areas and the shores of Lake Van was ordered by the government. The next day the Entente published its famous statement in which it announced that the Ottoman authorities would be held personally accountable for their role in the mistreatment of the Armenians, something which provoked both an official response from the Ottoman government accusing the Entente of inciting the Armenians to revolt and a noticeable increase in the brutality of the treatment of the Armenian deportees.

The final stages of the decision making process on the deportations are just concerned with providing formal legal cover for the operation : on 26 May Talât, as interior minister, submitted a draft decision to the cabinet that approved the removal of the Armenians on account of their collaboration with the enemy and earmarked their 'deserted' homes and villages for the settlement of Muslim refugees. This decision was then officially adopted by the cabinet on 31 May 1915.

When we look at this chronology and try to understand it as a decision making process, what do we see ?

It is quite clear that the Armenian policies of the Unionists were driven partly by the historical trauma of the loss of the Balkans and the lessons they thought they had learned from their Balkan adversaries : the need for the creation of a homogeneous nation. Demographic and social engineering (including 'ethnic cleansing') were essential tools in achieving this aim.

It is also clear that the Unionists, partly because of their social-darwinist worldview, were beset with existential fears. They saw the struggle they were engaged in as one about survival, as the memoirs of leading Unionists like Halil Menteşe, Celâl Bayar and Çerkes Reşit make clear. The combination of enemy attacks by the Russians and the British in March 1915, hard on the heels of the Ottoman defeats at Sarıkamış and the Suez Canal and rumours of a British invasion in the Gulf of Iskenderun made the Unionists genuinely anxious. The spectre of an Armenian rising in the imaginary "corridor" between advancing Russian and British invading armies was, to them, real.

Against this background of historical trauma and existential fear the Unionists made decisions in a rather haphazard and improvised way, in which their priorities seemed to shift continuously. Good examples of this are the deportations from Dörtyol and Zeytun, first to Konya province and then to the southeast (an overnight change of direction of 180 degrees) and

the treatment of the exempt Armenian communities (Catholics, Protestants, families of soldiers) or the policies on conversion to Islam. All of these changed several times over a short period.

What is also striking is the degree to which the decision making was informal and based on discussions within CUP networks rather than the formal organs of government. Local Unionist clubs and agents as well as Unionist officers called for action through direct communication with the Central Committee. İsmet directly approached Istanbul from Third Army headquarters and he could do so because he was a member of the Unionist inner circle and personally close to Enver. In early April an exchange of telegrams between Enver, Talât and Cemal, all three members of the inner circle and leaders of important factions within the CUP, seems to have shaped the policies on the Armenians in Cilicia.

When we look at the decisions that were taken, we see a tendency to create facts on the ground and thereby to gain the element of surprise. The best example of this is the cloak and dagger operation in Istanbul on 24 April 1915 (and in the following days) that decapitated the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire and severed its links with the outside world in one go, but one could also point to the sudden disarmament of the Armenians in the army in February. We also see a tendency to go for radical solutions and in fact, a very fast radicalization of anti-Armenian policies in the space of three or four months. Where there are different options, each time the most radical option being offered at the moment seems to win out, only to be followed by a further stage in the radicalization process shortly afterwards.

It is, of course, a historical fact that the deportations of 1915-16 have been accompanied by mass killings, both during the deportations themselves and afterwards in 1916 in the camps in the Syrian desert. It is a lot more difficult, though, than in the case of the deportations, to trace the decision making process on the massacres.

Of the three authors used in this summary, Dündar does not have much to say on this issue. Bloxham and Akçam paint a very similar picture but that is not surprising as Bloxham bases himself entirely on Akçam's earlier work for his topic. Akçam maintains that there is a strong possibility that the decision to embark on a 'final solution' of the Armenian problem, in other words : to exterminate the Armenians, was taken during discussions among leading unionists in Istanbul in late March 1915⁹. This contention is based on circumstantial evidence. After the declaration of war in October 1914 Bahaettin Şakır was sent to Erzurum, from where he tried to mobilize the local Muslim population in the border areas and raised militias composed of tribal forces, released prison inmates, and refugees. There is almost no documentation on his activities in the Ottoman state archives¹⁰ but the German and American representatives in Erzurum did report on them. On 24 January

he requested permission to come to Istanbul from Erzurum, and by the end of the February he actually travelled to the capital for consultations¹¹. He stayed in Istanbul for over a month. By 5 April the interior ministry cabled Erzurum that Bahaettin Şakır would shortly be returning to the east and that special appropriations would be made for Muslim refugees. There is no direct evidence of any meetings with members of the CUP Central Committee, or the Central Committee as such, in March, let alone of what was discussed there, but according to Akçam, Bahaettin Şakır managed to convince the Unionist leadership that the internal enemy (the Armenians) was just as dangerous as the external one and that he should be given a green light to deal with the problem¹². His evidence is flimsy, however. His only source is a Special Operations operative, Arif Cemil, who was based in Erzurum and worked with Bahaettin Şakır, but did not accompany him to Istanbul. In his serialized 1933-34 memoirs Arif Cemil says that Bahaettin returned to Erzurum in an entirely new position (presumably with greater authority and resources) and that a decision had been taken that he would be charged with the elimination of the 'internal enemies' of the country. Indirectly, the noted journalist and author Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın confirms that there were strong rumours within the CUP that Bahaettin Şakır (whom he describes as an extreme radical) was the *auctor intellectualis* of the extermination of the Armenians of western Anatolia. He also says, however, that 'even in their most intimate meetings' the issue was not openly discussed¹³. Therefore, even if we agree on the likelihood of some kind of decision being reached during meetings of the CUP top in Istanbul in March 1915, the actual *evidence* supporting this idea of Unionist 'Wannsee Conference' is waferthin. So here it may be especially important to see whether the patterns of Unionist decision making, if any exist, make it likely that things happened this way.

A similar question may be asked about the way the CUP handled communications. Both the decisions on the deportations and those on the extermination obviously had to be communicated in order to be executed. Akçam, basing himself partly on Vahakn Dadrian's earlier work, insists that the Unionists executed the genocide through a dual-track communications system. The official channels of government (primarily the interior ministry) were used for the transmission of decisions and orders on the deportations, while handwritten documents or even oral communications carried by trusted couriers were the preferred means of communication on the extermination policy. Sometimes a combination of written and oral was employed, when the couriers were ordered to read out the letter without handing it over. Those local administrators who were not prepared to act on the authority of such unofficial communications were usually replaced very quickly¹⁴.

The evidence for the existence of this parallel system of communications indeed seems compelling. Postwar cabinet minister Reşit Akif Pasha referred

to it in parliament. One of the leading military commanders, Vehip Pasha, confirmed it and a number of people testified to its existence during the post-war trials in Istanbul. As we shall see, we encounter this dual track system before the war, too.

Having drawn attention to a number of salient features of the decision making process in 1915 (its improvised and informal nature, the involvement of small groups of inner circle Unionists, radicalization, secrecy, the way decisions were communicated) it is time to look at other instances of Unionist decision making in 1913-1915 to see whether we can find the same characteristics at work there.

Of the four cases under review, the raid on the Sublime Porte on 23 January 1913 is probably the one that is least well documented. We have already noted that the archival records of the CUP have not survived. We have at our disposal a very limited number of primary sources (notably letters written by Enver in the weeks before the coup and one letter written by Talât to Hüseyin Cahid and Cavit) and a number of short references in memoirs. As Yusuf Hikmet Bayur already noted in his *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, published in 1943, most of the people involved in the coup d'état died young, so the descriptions in the memoirs of the survivors have gone largely uncontested¹⁵. There does not yet exist a monographic study of the coup.

The way the coup d'état was executed is well documented, because there were many eyewitnesses (participants, spectators and members of the government). It took place at around three o'clock in the afternoon of January 23, 1913.

On that afternoon, Enver rode down the hill from the CUP headquarters in Nuruosmaniye to the building of the Sublime Porte on a grey horse, accompanied by a small group of Unionist *fedais* (armed volunteers) on foot. Further down the hill, in Eminönü, militant members of the CUP's Istanbul organization had been told by Talât and the Istanbul party boss Kara Kemal to assemble in different cafe's, particularly in the café of the famous Meserret Hotel in Sirkeci, and to be ready. They were still waiting there when Enver came down the hill, but then were quickly mobilized to start a demonstration in the street outside the Porte. At the same time Ömer Naci, the famous Unionist orator, addressed the public with a fiery speech from the steps (or balcony, the sources are unclear) of the Ministry of Public Works, in which he said the government was about to hand over Edirne to the Bulgarians and that the Hero of Freedom, Enver Bey, was coming to rescue the country¹⁶. In the meantime, Enver and his followers entered the Porte, while the military guard stood and watched, but did not intervene. The attackers then went directly to the antechamber of the cabinet meeting room. The sound of voices and shots being fired brought war minister Nazım Pasha out of the cabinet room to enquire. When faced with Enver and the armed *fedais* he sharply rebuked him (and according to some sources added "Is this what you promised me?")¹⁷,

upon which he was shot through the head by one of the *fedais*, Yakup Cemil, and died. Enver and Talât (who had joined the raiding party) then entered the office of the grand vizier, Kâmil Pasha, and forced him to write out his resignation. Talât then ordered three CUP activists, Azmi, Nail and Sudi to take over the police directorate, while Kara Kemal occupied the directorate of post and telegraph. According to Enver the whole coup was over in fifteen minutes.

The coup d'état of 23 January was a watershed. It inaugurated the period of the CUP's one-party dictatorship, and the political climate in which all of the other four cases studied here took place, but for the purpose of this article it is primarily the decision making process that led to the coup that interests us.

The initiative for the coup seems to have come from Talât. Talât had remained in Istanbul when the Kâmil Pasha cabinet came to power and started to round up the leading unionists in October 1912, moving from one hideout to the next and keeping in touch with the underground CUP organization in the capital that was run by Kara Kemal. He seems to have been in touch with the war minister Nazım Pasha although it is not entirely clear who contacted whom. Nazım Pasha had been a key figure in the fall of the pro-Unionist government and the coming to power of the anti-Unionist cabinet of Ahmet Muhtar Pasha in July 1912, because he was trusted by the 'Saviour Officers' (Halâskar Zabitan) whose pressure had led to the change in government. After July he was their man in the cabinet. But according to Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, by the end of 1912 Nazım's position in the cabinet was weakening because of the disasters on the battlefield and Kâmil Pasha was actually planning to replace him with Mahmut Şevket Pasha¹⁸. This allowed the unionists, and particularly Talât and Enver to interest Nazım in cooperation. As a result, Nazım held talks with Talât in Sait Halim Pasha's villa in Yeniköy on the Bosphorus. After these talks he appointed leading Unionist officers to key positions : Enver became chief of staff of Hurşit Pasha's army corps (with troops in the capital) and Cemal was appointed 'menzil müfettişi' – inspector of the lines of communication between Istanbul and the front¹⁹. On 10 January Enver also talked with Nazım Pasha and came to an agreement about the need for a new government that would be ready to restart the war²⁰. Nazım's indignant exclamation "Is this what you promised me?" during the raid on the Porte was directed at Enver and must have referred to their earlier talks.

Shortly afterwards Talât called a meeting of leading CUP members in the private residence of a well-known unionist, Emin Beşe, in the Vefa district of Istanbul. There is no absolute certainty about who attended the meeting, but the following are mentioned : Sait Halim, Talât, Hacı Adil (Arda), Ziya Gökalp, İsmail Hakkı, Fethi (Okyar), Midhat Şükrü (Bleda), Cemal, Kara Kemal, Dr. Nazım and Enver's adjutant Mustafa Necip. Enver himself was supposed to attend, but he was inspecting a division in İzmit and could not reach the meeting in time²¹. One source describes this meeting as one of an

extended Central Committee²², but this is clearly not the case as only four out of twelve Central Committee members were among the participants.

At the meeting the options open to the CUP were discussed. Apparently Talât had originally wanted to opt for a coup d'état. He had already ordered Celâl (Bayar), the party chief (*kâtibi mesul* or 'responsible secretary') in Bursa, to come to the capital to take part in the coup²³. At the meeting, however, Fethi strongly opposed such a course of action, arguing that the government should take responsibility for the military disasters and the impending loss of Edirne. This would cost the cabinet its support in parliament and allow the CUP to regain power by democratic means. The majority sided with Fethi. The idea of a coup d'état was shelved for the moment. Celâl was told to return to Bursa.

Two leading Unionists who had fled abroad to escape the persecutions of the Kâmil Pasha cabinet, Cavit and Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın) received a letter from Talât sometime after the 10th and before the 23d of January. We know of the content of this letter from Cavit's memoirs²⁴. In it Talât laid out three options : to topple the government, to wait and see, and to conclude an agreement with members of the cabinet. He expressed himself in favour of the third option, partly because, as he says, "the army would not accept Fethi or Enver as war minister". Therefore they need to work with Nazım Pasha. In a second letter, sent a few days later, he explained to Cavit and Hüseyin Cahit that he had held discussions with a number of friends (Enver, Fethi, Cemal, İsmail Hakkı, Halil and Abdülkadir) and consulted others over the telegraph and that the consensus was that it was impossible to restart the war and break out of the Çatalca lines and that, therefore, a coup made no sense. This could be a reference to the meeting at which Fethi had successfully opposed the idea of a coup d'état, but that is not certain²⁵.

Within days of the sending of this letter the picture would change completely, however. Enver was incensed when he heard about the result of the meeting and at his insistence a second meeting was called, again in the house of Emin Beşe. Now Enver attended, but Fethi could not as he had had to return to his post in Gallipoli. As his letters show, Enver was desperate for a new cabinet that would order the Ottoman army to go on the offensive and his fiery rhetoric convinced those who attended the meeting. The decision to take over the government was taken then and there²⁶. The actual execution of the coup was laid in the hands of Enver and his trusted following of unionist *fedais* on the one hand and the militants of the Istanbul party organization under Talât and Kara Kemal on the other.

What strikes us about the decision making process of January 1913 is in the first place its makeshift, informal character. Of course, it is true that the CUP was not in government at the time, so it is not surprising that it used party channels rather than state ones, but even so : the vital decisions were not taken by any formal body within the CUP or according to any established

internal process. Rather, it was a handful of members of the inner circle brought together by Talât in a private house, who debated the issue and took the decision. Within the informal inner circle the advocates of the most radical solution (in this case Talât and particularly Enver, arguing for an armed takeover of government) carried the day after the leading moderate (Fethi) had been cut out of the process. The decision was then communicated orally to those who were charged with the actual execution. Both the decision making and the planning stages were short and took place against a backdrop of a fast evolving political situation. The coup itself was, in the words of Aydemir, an “all or nothing gamble”²⁷. Those involved were prepared to put their lives on the line and to use extreme violence when needed, shooting and killing guards in the building of the Sublime Porte and even the war minister himself.

Unlike the “Raid on the Sublime Porte” of 23 January 1913, all three events from 1914 that are being reviewed here (the expulsion of the Greek Orthodox, the conclusion of the treaty of alliance with Germany and the attack on Russia), have been the object of meticulous academic research. Let us look first at what that research has to tell us about the decision to force the Greek Orthodox of the shores of Asia Minor from the country in June 1914.

Emre Erol’s study of the expulsions shows that there were several different motives for the decision to force about 150 000 Greek Orthodox, who were living in the coastal areas from Muğla in the south to Edremit in the north, out of the country. In part it was an act of revenge, triggered by the defeat in the Balkan War and the suffering of the *muhacirs* from the Balkans, some 400 000 of whom had been forced to leave their native lands. That in such an event retribution would be inflicted on the Greek Orthodox of Asia Minor was not a new idea. As a matter of fact, the Unionists had threatened to do this as far back as July 1908²⁸. The Balkan disaster triggered the execution of this old threat. The need to settle the *muhacirs* and to provide accommodation and arable land for them was a second motive. The third, and certainly the most important, motive was the fear about the military vulnerability of the western coast in the case of renewed war with Greece. Thanks to the naval superiority provided by the new battle cruiser *Averoff*, Greece had conquered the islands that were adjacent to the Anatolian coast (Samos/Sisam, Chios/Sakız, Lesbos/Midilli, Lemnos/Limni) early in the war. This loss was still contested by the Ottomans in early 1914, but Greece had full control over them and was militarizing the islands. Thus, the islands were now ideal jumping off points for an armed invasion of Asia Minor, and the Unionists feared that the Greek Orthodox of the area might side with an invading Greek force if war was to be resumed.

The tensions over the issue rose sharply when the Great Powers awarded the islands to Greece on the 14th of February. This led to a renewed boycott of Greek businesses in the Ottoman Empire as well as to an increase in the

number of Greek Orthodox from Thrace fleeing the country. This latter development, which reached large proportions in March and April, seems to have been mostly 'spontaneous' in the sense that it was a reaction to violence from local Muslims and incoming *muhacir* groups, rather than the effect of Unionist policies at the center. The growing violence against minorities in both Greece and the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of the Balkan War meant that, for the first time, the idea of a wholesale exchange of populations received serious attention. Talks about such an exchange were started in May, but the conditions put forward by both parties blocked any true progress. The expulsions may also have been intended to put pressure on Greece to accept an exchange²⁹.

Unfortunately we know almost nothing about the actual decision making process within the CUP with regard to this issue in the first half of 1914. What we do know, is that a well-known Unionist *fedai* with close links to Enver, Kuşçubaşızade Eşref, was sent to the west coast in March to draw up a report on the situation³⁰. Eşref was a member of a Circassian *muhacir* family that had been settled in Salihli (east of Izmir) and he was born and bred in the area. His report on the relative strength of Muslims and Greeks in the region and the dangers of Greek disloyalty does not survive, but the quotes from the report given in Celâl (Bayar)'s memoirs make clear that it was urgent and alarmist. It caused Talât to send one of his most trusted agents, Celâl (Bayar), the party secretary of Bursa and the same person who had been summoned to Istanbul when the coup d'état seemed imminent, to Izmir as party secretary for the whole of Aydin province (which included the whole coastline up to the Gulf of Edremit in the north). From May onwards there were discussions on the issue both at the War Ministry and in Talât's private residence. According to Eşref (who apparently took part in the discussions) only some of the members of the cabinet were aware of these discussions.

At the end of May the expulsions started. Between 28 May and 16 June some 120 000 Greek Orthodox were forced out through a combination of violence and intimidation. According to Celâl's own testimony, the campaign was orchestrated by him and Eşref on the express orders of Talât. Talât himself meanwhile embarked on an inspection tour of the coastal areas from 8 June onwards, as much as anything to be out of reach of the ambassadors in Istanbul and their increasingly urgent protests. Within three weeks it was all over and, except for the 190 000-strong Greek community of Izmir itself, the coastal Greeks had virtually disappeared³¹.

When we look at the issue in terms of the decision making process, two elements are striking. We do not know exactly who participated in the discussions in Istanbul, but we do know that Enver and Talât relied for the analysis of the situation and the execution of the plan on two known loyalists with whom they had close personal ties. On the other hand, they seem to have excluded the one person who officially held a key position : the governor of Aydin province.

This is all the more surprising as, since October 1913, that position was held by one of the most prominent Unionists, Evranoszade Rahmi (Arslan). Rahmi had been a founding member of the precursor of the CUP, the Ottoman Freedom Society in Salonica in 1906 and within the CUP his seniority was second only to that of Talât. Until the loss of Salonica he had been a very influential figure in that city. His policies in Izmir are interpreted variously in the sources. According to Dündar, who relies on French and British consular reports, Rahmi threatened to extradite all Greek Orthodox unless the Aegean islands were returned to the Ottoman Empire. The date of this report is March 1914. On 22 September the British consul reports that Rahmi is planning to extradite the Greeks in groups and hand over their real estate to refugees from Macedonia³². This shows that Rahmi was ready to use the Greek Orthodox in his province as bargaining chips. Erol, on the other hand, notes that hard line Unionists like Cafer Tayyar, the newly appointed chief of staff of the Fourth Army, called for the appointment of someone else as responsible party secretary, as they considered Rahmi unsuitable. Erol thinks that this is due to Rahmi's moderate stance during the anti-Greek boycott of 1913-14³³. Rahmi's role in the boycott had indeed been ambivalent. He has expressed his sympathy with the boycotters on account of the events in Macedonia at times displayed a great anger at the Greeks (and native of Salonica and a large landowner in Macedonia he had a very personal reason to be angry). On the other hand he had also made efforts to stop the boycott from June onwards³⁴.

Whatever the reason, Rahmi was left out of the actual organization and execution of the expulsions. Neither Eşref nor Celâl took orders from him. This side-lining of Rahmi seems to confirm the existence of a pattern, i.e. that those members of the innermost circle of the CUP who were opposed to the most radical course of action or who were suspected of being opposed to it, were kept out of the key decision making process. This happened to Fethi (Okyar) in January 1913, it happened to Rahmi in the spring of 1914 and it would happen to Ahmet Cemal and Mehmet Cavit in the next event reviewed here.

That event is the conclusion of the alliance treaty with Germany on August, 2nd, 1914. This has been researched in great detail by Ulrich Truppener and Mustafa Aksakal on the basis of the archival records of the German and Austrian foreign ministries, as well as, in the case of Aksakal, Ottoman state archives. Thanks to the hectic diplomatic traffic during the July crisis of 1914, we know very accurately how the negotiations between the Ottomans and the Germans proceeded and what the role of the Austrians was. The archives tell us very little, however, about the decision making process within the Ottoman government and the CUP.

We now know that it was the Ottomans and the Austrians rather than the Germans, who took the initiative for the alliance. As early as 15-16 July the grand vizier, Sait Halim Pasha, declared to the German ambassador Baron Wangenheim

the Ottoman Empire's interest in a defensive alliance with Germany³⁵. Two days later, the Austrian envoy, Pallavicini, pleaded with Wangenheim for such an alliance with the argument that this would bring in the other Balkan states (Bulgaria, Romania) on the Austrian side in the conflict with Serbia and neutralize Greece. On the 22nd, Enver, now minister of war, approached Wangenheim. He proposed a secondary alliance of Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania, which would then be linked as a whole to the Triple Alliance³⁶. Wangenheim duly reported all these *ouvertures* to Berlin, making a point of noting his own scepticism about the idea of an alliance. As is by now well known, he was overruled by the Kaiser himself and on the 24th received instructions to proceed with the alliance. Wangenheim opened negotiations with Sait Halim Pasha, who on the 27th produced a draft text. The Ottomans wanted a treaty that would run for at least as long as the contract of the German military mission. By pure coincidence, therefore, the treaty would be valid until the end of 1918 (and renewable for five year terms thereafter). Sait Halim insisted that the Ottoman cabinet be kept out of the negotiations and that the negotiations would take place in the strictest secrecy, in order not to alarm the Entente prematurely³⁷.

On 1 August (the day of the German declaration of war against Russia) Wangenheim received authorisation to sign from Berlin and on 2 August, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the fateful treaty was signed³⁸.

This much is clear from the studies based on the diplomatic reporting, but thankfully some of the major players and indeed some of those who were kept out of the negotiations, have left memoirs that give us a better insight in how the CUP handled this issue internally.

Throughout the secret negotiations interior minister Talât, war minister Enver and the president of the chamber of deputies Halil (Menteşe) discussed the issue with Sait Halim, usually during nightly sessions at the latter's villa in Yeniköy. In his memoirs, which he wrote after the war in exile in Berlin, Talât confirms that Sait Halim wanted to conduct the negotiations himself and to keep them secret. The three leading Unionists involved in the negotiations supported the idea of the German alliance, partly because, according to Talât, they did not think the conflict would turn into a general European war. If true, this is astoundingly naive, especially after the German declaration of war on Russia of 1 August. Talât also confirms that the members of the cabinet were only told of the existence of the treaty after the fact³⁹.

Halil (Menteşe)'s account tallies with that of Talât. He explains his own presence at the secret talks on the basis of the mutual trust that existed between him and the grand vizier. Halil also mentions that Wangenheim was accompanied during the negotiations and the signing by the German chief dragoman Weber⁴⁰.

Enver has left no memoirs on this episode and his biographer Şevket Süreyya Aydemir relies heavily on the diaries or notebooks of finance

minister Mehmet Cavit. These memoirs were published much later, but both Aydemir and Yusuf Hikmet Bayur had access to the manuscript, written in red ink. Cavit was a leading CUP member from Salonica and a cabinet minister, but he was kept out of the negotiations nonetheless. According to his diary, on 23 July (the national holiday) Sait Halim showed him a draft of a possible treaty with Germany. Enver, Halil and Talât were present at the time. He claims to have been too much taken aback to express an opinion, but says that the others were clearly very happy with it. Later, Cavit was aware of the fact that there were three or four nightly discussions of the treaty at Sait Halim's villa, from which both he and the navy minister Cemal Pasha were expressly excluded. According to the diary, he was very angry about this treatment by his colleagues⁴¹.

Once the treaty had been signed, Cavit, who thought it was a mistake, tried to convince Talât and through him the others at least to extract a number of additional assurances from Germany. In this he was ultimately successful. The amendments were discussed on 4 August and accepted by Germany in a separate letter on the 6th⁴².

Ahmet Cemal, too, was of course one of the key members of the CUP. Indeed, he is often regarded as the third member of the "triumvirate" with Enver and Talât. Nevertheless he was also left unaware of the secret negotiations. He gives an account of the way he was initiated into the secret in his post-war memoirs. Cemal says that Wangenheim hinted at the possibility of an alliance when they met during the national day celebrations on 23 July. A few days later he was just getting into his car in the Istanbul district of Şişli, where he lived, when he saw Enver, Talât and Halil in a car coming from the direction of Maslak. He immediately concluded that they were returning from Yeniköy. When he asked Enver whence they had come, Enver said he had encountered Halil and Talât in the street and given them a lift⁴³. After that Cemal was clearly suspicious, but he heard nothing until he was invited to the grand vizier's villa on 2 August. When he arrived (after a long delay because of bad weather) he was told about the treaty that had just been signed. Cavit has also been invited and arrives later. Cemal confirms that Cavit had also been kept completely in the dark. The Şeyhülislam is the only other cabinet member who has been informed by Sait Halim about the conclusion of the alliance⁴⁴.

Like Cavit, Cemal was clearly puzzled and angry about the decision to keep him outside the decision making process, even if after some consideration he supported the principle of the German alliance. No reasons for the exclusion of Cavit and Cemal were given to either, but it is quite clear that the fact that both had a reputation of being francophile and that they both had excellent relations with the French, was a reason not to trust them with this strategic information. Once again we see that a very small and informally constituted group of Unionists took the decisions and that those who

expressed opposition or were expected to voice opposition to a radical policy decision were cut out of the decision making process, even if they were core members of the CUP of long standing. In essence, the decision to link the fate of the Ottoman Empire to that of Germany was taken by four people during three or four nightly meetings in a room in Yeniköy.

The final event analysed here as an example of Unionist decision making, is the decision actually to go to war by attacking the Russian fleet in October 1914.

By late September German pressure on the Ottoman government to intervene militarily and join the war effort was rising continuously. The Ottoman cabinet, supported in this by ambassador Wangenheim, who still held to his conviction that Ottoman armed and benevolent neutrality was a much greater asset than a war that might bring about the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, tried to play for time by arguing that the empire needed large-scale German financial assistance for the mobilization effort and that Bulgaria needed to be brought into the alliance as well. Time, and the patience of Berlin, were running out, however. To appease the Germans, on 8 October Enver submitted a plan for military intervention for German approval⁴⁵. On 11 October, at an intimate lunch in the ambassador's summer residence in Therapeia/Tarabya, attended by Talât, Enver, Halil, Sait Halim and Cemal, Wangenheim announced that all the Ottoman financial demands had been met (the first installment of German gold had actually arrived in Istanbul) and that there was no excuse for further delay⁴⁶.

The Black Sea squadron was now ready to move. On 24 October the commanders of all sixteen participating ships were given sealed orders, signed by Cemal as minister of the navy. These were channelled through the naval liaison at the German embassy, Enver's old friend Humann, to the naval commander, admiral Souchon. Enver himself handed Souchon his orders and the way he did this, described in Aksakal's work on the basis of Souchon's account, is especially interesting. He gave him a sealed envelope with orders to strike at the Russian navy and gain naval superiority in the Black Sea, but Souchon was only to open the envelope after receiving a radio message telling him to do so. If Enver would be blocked politically because the majority of the cabinet opposed war, Souchon would receive a radio message telling him not to open the envelope. This, however, was the pre-arranged code telling the admiral to press on regardless on his own initiative. In the event Enver never sent any message and the admiral acted on his own initiative⁴⁷.

The reason this is so interesting, is that it shows the twin-channel system of communication at work that was so typical of the CUP's *modus operandi*. Talât had done the same five months before, when he publicly called on local administrators to do everything in their power to stop the violence against the Greeks, while at the same time instructing Celâl to carry out the

expulsions as quickly as possible. Like Talât, Enver in October took care to have deniability built into his communications. As discussed at the start of this article, this built-in deniability through the parallel use of official and unofficial communication would become a salient feature of the anti-Armenian policies of the CUP in 1915.

The result of the decisions of the five (the original four who had been active in July-August and Cemal) are, of course, well known. On 27 October the fleet steamed into the Black Sea and on the 29th it attacked the Russian naval ports. When the news reached Istanbul it caused a crisis in the cabinet. Five ministers, including the grand vizier, threatened to resign. To appease them, Enver sent a ceasefire order to the fleet, but at the same time hinted to Souchon that it could be disregarded – yet another example of the dual-track communication strategy of the CUP⁴⁸.

In the afternoon of 30 October, the cabinet met once more. Cemal Pasha briefed it on the naval engagement, giving a wholly untrue depiction of what had happened in which the Russians had attacked the Ottoman fleet during the latter's exercises. By now the grand vizier had retracted his threat to resign, leaving only Cavit among the Unionists in opposition. In the evening a second meeting took place, this time of the cabinet with the Central Committee of the CUP. The result of the meeting was that a conciliatory note was sent to the Russian government, but the Unionists refused any more far-reaching measures such as the recalling of the fleet, the repatriation of all German officers or the tearing up of the treaty⁴⁹.

On 31 October Enver told Humann that 27 CUP members had met and that a majority of 17 had decided for war⁵⁰. Trumpener interprets this to mean that there must have been another meeting of the CUP in the morning of the 30th. This may indeed be the case, but Cavit, who gives the most detailed account of the events of this day, does not mention such a meeting. It is in fact more likely that Enver referred to the joint evening meeting with the cabinet. If so, the composition of the meeting is unclear. The Central Committee at the time was composed of twelve members and the cabinet had eleven members. Sait Halim sat on both, so a meeting of the two bodies would have involved 22 people. In all probability the meeting of the 27 was yet another makeshift, informal affair bringing together influential members from the CUP's inner circle with the cabinet and not just the Central Committee. The fact that Cavit mentions Halil (Menteşe)'s presence would seem to indicate that this was indeed the case, as he was a member of neither body. Of course, even if the evening meeting had been limited to the Central Committee and the cabinet, it would still be a completely informal arrangement that had no place in the constitutional structure of the empire.

As far as the cabinet was concerned, once war was declared, four ministers resigned and seven stayed on. The only Unionist to resign was Cavit Bey.