

THE ARMENIAN QUESTION AT THE MEETING OF AMBASSADORS OF THE GREAT POWERS IN CONSTANTINOPLE: THE YENI-KÖY NEGOTIATIONS

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Due to the vigorous efforts of Russian diplomacy, the ambassadors of the Great Powers in Constantinople were planning to convene a conference in June 1913 to discuss the issue of Armenian reforms. The initiative to raise the Armenian issue belonged to Russia. The project, authored by Andrey Mandelstam, the first translator of the Russian embassy in Constantinople, was presented for discussion. Upon learning through the German Embassy that a conference of ambassadors was to be convened in Constantinople to discuss the issue of Armenian reforms, the Young Turk Government made the last effort to prevent the discussion of the Armenian Question. On the eve of the Russian project presentation, on June 16, Grand Vizier Said Halim Pasha addressed a special circular to the ambassadors of the six states in Constantinople, announcing that the Ottoman government had already completed general reforms, and, therefore, is begging them to demonstrate material and moral support.¹ When the Turkish request was accepted, the discussion of the Armenian reforms became redundant.

On June 19, that is the day before the opening of the Conference, the Young Turks submitted to the embassies of Constantinople a draft on the General Reforms of the Ottoman Empire, which was summarized in the "Circular Telegraph", dated March 13, 1913, as a supplement to the Provisional Law on "Provincial Governance Law", and to the articles and instructions regarding the powers of the Chief Inspector. The Turkish program was not designed specifically for Armenian vilayets. The Ittihad government had, in fact, no plan for Armenian reforms. The new plan was designed for the whole empire. It is no coincidence that there was no mention of the name Armenia in it.

The Turkish plan was to divide the whole empire into six inspection sectors. The Western Armenia or as it was said in the program, the "Eastern Vilayets" would enter into the third and fifth sectors. The third sector included the vilayets of Erzurum, Sivas, Trabzon and Janik, and the fifth included the vilayets of Van, Bitlis, Kharbert and Diyarbakır. It is noteworthy that the layout of the Armenian sectors was chosen so that they could easily access predominantly Muslim areas.² Each sector would be headed by a European inspector-general appointed by the Turkish government without the participation of the Powers. The chief inspectors would have European and Turkish

¹ See AVPRI, f. Embassy in Constantinople, inventory 517/2, file 3728, p. 105.

² Idem: file 3735, p. 3.

assistants. The Young Turk program reserved chief inspectors the right to appoint senior sector officials, with the exception of the financial supervisor and judges. The change of gendarmerie and police staff could only be done with the permission of the central government. The chief inspectors, after obtaining the consent of the local authorities, were entitled to submit to the central government bills arising from local needs. The Turkish government accepted the principle of mobile courts, and was obliged to set up courts in each case³.

The Turkish government acknowledged the importance of inviting foreign specialists and carrying out reforms with their help, but denied the need for European control over their use. The Young Turks were well aware that foreign specialists, going into Ottoman service, would become ordinary Turkish graduates, so they could quickly get rid of the unwanted. It is no coincidence that the Turkish ambassador to St. Petersburg assured Deputy Foreign Minister A. A. Neratov that European leaders will be in charge of the two sectors, and other European specialists will also be invited to oversee administrative work in those sectors⁴. The issue was different under European control, which would allow the powers to individually or collectively influence the Turkish government and oversee the implementation of reforms. It was precisely the lack of control that had given the Abdulhamid and Young Turk administrations, starting from the Berlin Summit, the opportunity to avoid reforms. Therefore, it was quite understandable that the Young Turks were stubborn in their refusal of European control. As early as May 21, the Young Turk Government had informed the ambassadors of the Powers at Constantinople that "for the reforms to be carried out in the eastern provinces it should not accept the balance of powers".⁵ Russian diplomats held the opposite view, believing that if the powers were not allowed to participate in the process of appointing chief auditors and establishing European control over the implementation of reforms, then "Armenian reforms are practically unworkable".⁶ The program of Ittihad did not say anything about issues of vital importance to Western Armenians, such as the land question, the participation of equal numbers of Christians and Muslims in administrations, the selectivity of state assemblies, and so on. It was obvious that the Turkish program was drawn up in a hurry to expel the Russian project, so the demands, put forward, were "unrelated and programmatic".⁷

It is noteworthy that the real aims of the Young Turk program of post-imperial reform have been revealed by none other than the Young Turk leaders and the masterminds of the Armenian Genocide Jemal Pasha, who confesses in his memoirs: "In an effort to weaken the influence of the Russians, we were planning to hand over control of these two regions (meaning the third and fifth sectors) to the British. Our

³ See Reforms 1915: 116-121.

⁴ See AVPRI, f. Embassy in Constantinople, inventory 517/2, file 3734, p. 122.

⁵ See Buzandion, 28. 05. 1913.

⁶ AVPRI, f. Chancellery, 1913, file 114, p. 413.

⁷ Reforms 1915: 72.

ambassador to London Tevfik Pasha was instructed by Sir Edward Gray to clarify whether England would agree to send its officials to Turkey. The British Foreign Minister said that England would probably favor the proposal.

At that time the Grand Vizier sent an official application to the British Government. If England had accepted our proposal, the Russian program would have been doomed to failure. When we heard that England did not want to send officials to Eastern Anatolia, our hopes were finally dashed, and we realized that England was delivering us to the whims of Russia."⁸

The Austrian-German armament was also prepared for the ambassadors' meeting. On June 15, a meeting of the Ambassador of Austria-Hungary J.M. von Pallavicini and the Ambassador of Germany H. von Wangenheim was held, where the parties came to a joint statement to apply a common strategy Pallavicini had planned to announce at the very beginning of the meeting of ambassadors that Mandelstam's plan was unacceptable to his government and thereby abolish the convocation of the conference. However, Wangenheim advised to refrain from hasty steps. The point is that the German ambassador had met with the representatives of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople the previous day and was aware of the excitement that the failure of the conference would cause among them. So the Austrian-German alliance decided not to hinder the convention.⁹

On June 17, 1913, the meeting of the Ambassadors at Constantinople was held. From the outset, Russian Ambassador M.N.Giers said that "the initiative of this discussion belongs to his government, which is driven by concerns about improving the condition of the neighboring peoples of Russian territory".¹⁰ The Russian ambassador pointed out that his country is more interested in Armenian reforms than any other power and urged that the negotiation process be organized expeditiously. He then presented the ambassadors with a Russian draft of Armenian reforms, which he described "not as an expression of his government's final views, but Mr. Mandelstam's own work".¹¹ Pallavicini said that "at the same time, it would be useful to discuss the Turkish draft, which will soon be presented to the embassy".¹² Ambassador M.N.Giers responded that his government was unaware of the Turkish plan, probably due to a lack of final intentions, so he "demanded a priority right in his government that no one objected to".¹³ Wangenheim's approach was noteworthy, who emphasized in his speech the German "government's interest in the Armenians of both small and large Armenia",

⁸ Jemal Pasha 1923: 227.

⁹ See Mikayelyan 1995 (ed.): 67.

¹⁰ Kirakosyan 1972 (ed.): 240.

¹¹ Idem.

¹² Idem.

¹³ Idem.

to which Giers responded that the Article 20 of the Mandelstam project "specifically refers to Armenians living outside the six vilayets".¹⁴

Eventually the ambassadors decided to start discussing the Mandelstam project. To this end, a special committee consisting of one embassy representative was established. It included: A.N.Mandelstam (Russia), G.H.Fitzmaurice (England), R.D. de Saint-Quentin (France), Schoenberg (Germany), M. Panfili (Austria-Hungary) and Schaber (Italy). With the consent of the ambassadors, the Armenian Reform Commission convened its sessions at the Austrian-Hungarian Embassy in Constantinople's Yeni-köy district. Panfili, the Austrian-Hungarian embassy representative, was elected as president of the conference. The conference had eight sessions, from June 20 to July 11.

At the very first session, the representatives of Germany and Austria-Hungary refused to discuss the Russian draft. Taking into consideration the June 16th Circular of the Sublime Porte, they offered to base the negotiations on the Turkish program. Chaber, the Italian delegate, initially hesitated but then joined the Austrian-German view. They were well aware that with the discussion of the Turkish program the conference would never serve its purpose and would come to a dead end. The Triple Alliance agreed to attend the conference to fail its work. The representatives of England and France have argued that the Russian project should be the basis for mandate work. Mandelstam himself had to use all the tools in his diplomatic arsenal to prove that they were empowered to discuss the issue of the Armenian reforms rather than the whole empire.¹⁵ Without agreeing, the parties decided to report their disagreements to their leaders. That is how the first session ended.

On June 21, Ambassador Giers met Pallavicini and tried to explain the behavior of the Triple Alliance. The Austrian-Hungarian ambassador described the incident as a misunderstanding, as if the representatives had not understood the meaning of their recommendation and promised to begin discussing the Russian program at the next session. After the meeting, Giers telegraphed S.D.Sazonov, Russian foreign minister. "Undoubtedly we had a deliberate attempt to give secondary importance to the Russian project ...".¹⁶ After examining the Mandelstam project, Wangenheim came to the conclusion that regarding the Armenian province in the future "Russia would be the first to claim on it since the other half of the Armenians live in Russia. That would be the beginning of the disintegration."¹⁷ In a telegram addressed to the Foreign Office, Wangenheim complained: "The Russian project on Armenia also includes the vilayet of Diyarbakır, which, by the way, is part of our zone".¹⁸

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ See Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, archive, document 288, p. 109-110.

¹⁶ Reforms 1915: 73.

¹⁷ See Mikayelyan 1995 (ed.): 68.

¹⁸ Idem.

However, the Triple Alliance, given the growing interest of the Armenian regions in the Yeni-köy negotiations, had to change the tactics of bringing the conference work to a standstill. After granting their representatives appropriate authority, Wangenheim and Pallavicini were instructed not to "debate in principle at all and, on the contrary, to insist on a thorough discussion of certain points in the Russian program, to demand a thorough examination of Turkey's proposals. First, we need to win time for the Turkish troops, coming back home, to enter Armenia and to find out England's position in advance".¹⁹ At the second meeting on June 24, the representatives of the Triple Alliance agreed to adopt a Russian draft as a starting point for discussion of Armenian reforms.

The first sessions of the conference showed that negotiations in Yeni-köy were doomed to failure. The countries of the Triple Alliance, in discussing each article of the Mandelstam draft, based on the principle of non-infringement of the Sultan's sovereignty, rejected even claims that had already been accepted by the Powers as early as 1895. Thus, for example, the representatives of the Triple Alliance considered unacceptable the Russian proposals to appoint a governor-general and give him executive power over the province.²⁰

The following fact testifies about the biased attitude of the Triple Alliance. At the third session on June 27, Mandelstam proposed to create a post of governor-general to govern the executive power of the Armenian state. The governor-general was to be appointed by the Sultan for a period of five years, with the consent of the Powers. The representatives of England and France stated that they fully comply with local requirements. Panfili, an Austro-Hungarian representative, offered to retain the position of governor and to appoint chief foreign auditors instead of governor-general, excluding the possibility of the Powers participating. He insisted that the implementation of the Russian proposal would lead to a restriction of the Sultan's rule. Schonberg, a German representative, defended Panfili's proposal and stated that "the Russians want to make Armenia an autonomous province that, like all previous attempts, will endanger Turkey's territorial status quo".²¹ Chaber, the Italian representative, defended the Allies' view. Mandelstam's proposition that the precedent of appointing the governor-general with the participation of the Powers was already known in Lebanon, was resisted by Schoenberg: "the structure of Lebanon", he said, "cannot be spread over a territory that is more than 80 times larger than its own".²²

Seeing the outright denial of the Austrian-German alliance when discussing the Mandelstam project, the English and French diplomatic circles tried to find a way out of the impasse. In particular, French diplomacy endorsed the proposal to abandon the radical demands of the discussed version of Armenian reforms and to develop a project

¹⁹ *Idem.*

²⁰ See Reforms 1915: 130-142.

²¹ Mikayelyan 1995 (ed.): 79.

²² *Idem.*

acceptable for the German and Turkish governments. It was assumed that France and England would jointly persuade the Russian side that their plan, sooner or later, "should go against the proposals of the government of Berlin (without talking about Turkey), so it might be more appropriate not to go ahead and thereby reduce the program of reforms and make it accessible to everyone".²³ M. Stephen Pichon, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs thought that even a completely new project could be drafted and submitted to Russia and the UK for approval.

In fact, the position of the Triple Alliance on the Mandelstam project in Yeni-köy caused controversy within the Entente itself. It turned out that the British diplomacy was also concerned with the creation of a united Armenian state, which, in Ed. Gray's opinion, would initiate the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, and in that case Germany would demand its share. On June 21, Gray said in a telegram to Gerald Buchanan, the British Ambassador to Saint-Petersburg that one should return to the earlier Sazonov-agreed offer, namely to send small country officers to Armenian vilayets. Gray also accepted France's earlier offer. He wrote: "I am also ready to support the French proposal to appoint a high commissioner to meet urgent demands as a temporary measure".²⁴ It was obvious that the British government was worried about the prospect of amputation of the Ottoman Empire, which in Gray's view "could have lead to nothing but painful results among the Muslim people of British India".²⁵

Russian diplomacy faced a difficult dilemma. In fact, the Russian program was criticized not only by the rival Troika but also by its ally Entente. Adding to this the difficulty of forcing the Turkish government to reform Armenia, the failure of the Mandelstam project became real. Russia had to make a choice, either to continue the talks with the prospect of a deadlock, and to seek results after their end, or to comply with the allies' admonitions and to be satisfied with temporary and moderate measures. Russian diplomacy was convinced that half-measures would not only satisfy Armenians, but could not provide real results and would discredit them. Therefore, it decided to move steadfastly and not to deviate from the negotiated path of agreement between the powers over the Mandelstam project.

On June 25, 1913, the imperial government addressed a special circular to the German, Austrian-Hungarian and Italian ambassadors in Petersburg. The circular said that, like all other states, Russia had a negative attitude towards any option to amputate the Ottoman Empire, and its stance on reforms was based entirely on the aspiration to pacify the neighboring Armenian vilayets. Writing in greater detail the motives of Russian activities in the Armenian Question, the memorandum stated: "The imperial government cannot tolerate the chronic state of disorder and anarchy, which, due to the proximity of the Turkish border, can affect the border regions of the Caucasus in the most dangerous way. The latest news comes to confirm the impression that in the near

²³ Kirakosyan 1972 (ed.): 252.

²⁴ Idem: 254.

²⁵ Idem: 255.

future one can expect deep regrets by the Kurds. The weakness and inadequacy of the Turkish local authorities have foretold the possibility of horrific events that the imperial government can never remain indifferent to".²⁶ In the end, the circular called for full agreement on Armenian reforms to eliminate the imminent danger and the prospect of forthcoming danger of loss.²⁷

Concerning British proposals for interim measures, in a separate memorandum to the British Embassy, the Russian Foreign Minister stated that "it is advisable, without prejudice to their practical capacity, to present them first for the consideration of the Ambassadors of Constantinople."²⁸ In fact, Russia rejected the British proposal to take temporary measures.

In response to the Russian circular, the German Embassy in Petersburg submitted a special memorandum to the Russian government on June 26 stating: "If it had been implemented (Mandelstam's project - M. M.), half of Anatolia would have been Armenia, which would have been weakly connected to Turkey, thanks to the Sultan's rule. It would be difficult to deny the rest of Turkey what is allowed to Armenia".²⁹ German diplomacy accused the Russian government of attempting to split the Ottoman Empire.

Asked about the position taken by the Troika Alliance over the Mandelstam project in Eni-köy, the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, for its part, also sought to draw the issue of Armenian reform from the deadlock. On July 3 and 4, the Patriarchate handed over a Memorandum of Understanding to the Ambassadors of the Great Powers. The Patriarchate, analyzing the provisions of the Russian project one by one, showed that they did not contradict either the Sultan's authority or the decisions of the Powers on the Armenian Question. The Patriarchate has proven that Mandelstam's plan is not a program of autonomy for Western Armenia, but aims to improve the dire situation of the Armenian population. In the end, the Patriarchate put forward unshakable demands that could be met with positive results. These included the creation of a fully unified Armenian decentralized province, the administration of state power, the appointment of a European commissioner of the Powers, the participation of Armenians, equal to Muslims, in state assemblies and administrative boards, state administration, judicial system, the use of the Armenian language in the courts and laws, the impartial re-structuring of the judiciary, the return of administratively deprived lands to Western Armenians, and the establishment of effective European control in every place.³⁰

Neither the circular of Russian diplomacy nor the memorandum of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople gave any real result. The representatives of the Triple Alliance in Yeni-köy persisted in rejecting Mandelstam's articles. They even considered

²⁶ Idem: 257.

²⁷ Idem.

²⁸ Idem: 256.

²⁹ Reforms 1915: 76.

³⁰ See the NAA, f. 57, l. 5, file 35, p. 30-37.

unacceptable such elementary demands as the inclusion of Christians, with an equal number of Muslims, in state and administrative assemblies, police and gendarmerie bodies, the recognition of Armenian schools by the supreme commander-in-chief only, the return of illegally seized lands to Armenians, non-settlement of mujahiris in Armenian provinces, etc. At the seventh session of July 10, the representatives of the Triple Alliance countries issued a statement proposing reforms that would be based entirely on the Turkish program. At the same time, they considered it possible to submit to the Turkish government some additional requirements, such as the dissolution of Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments, the deprivation of nomads, the right to establish private schools by Armenians, the establishment of European control through diplomatic intervention, the immunity of the national constitution, the inclusion of non-Muslims in the police and gendarmerie by the principle of proportionality, the translation of the published laws and court judgments into Armenian.³¹

The additional demands put forward by the Triple Alliance did not touch clearly the foundations of the policy of persecuting Armenians, pursued by the Turkish government. By adopting them, the Armenian reforms would be deprived of practical significance, since the proposed version of European control was the very mechanism that had eliminated the use of reforms after 1878. Therefore, on July 11, at the last eighth session of the Armenian Reforms Conference, Mandelstam declared that the Russian government had rejected all the proposals made by the German, Austrian-Hungarian and Italian representatives.³² Thus the Yeni-köy Conference on Armenian Reforms ceased its work.

All the blame for the failure of Yeni-köy negotiations lies with the Troika countries and, above all, with Germany. Seeking to put the issue of Armenian reforms in the direction of the Young Turks, the German ruling districts did not take into account the vital interests of Western Armenians. They were well aware that with the adoption of the Mandelstam project the influence of Russia would finally be strengthened in Western Armenia. That is why they did everything in their power to bring the Yeni-köy talks to a standstill. As for the delegates from Austria-Hungary and Italy, they simply obeyed the will of the German representative Schoenberg. In general, the Troika countries showed enormous unity in overcoming the problem of Armenian reforms in Yeni-köy. Russian Charge d'Affaires in Constantinople Gulkevich wrote that "if the protocols of the Yeni-köy commission were ever published, Armenians would have the opportunity to become convinced of the true feelings of the Germans who, at the same time, sought to capture them with flattering promises."³³

³¹ Reforms 1915: 186-187.

³² *Idem*: 188.

³³ Reforms 1915: 106. And, indeed, the Russian government took due care to publish the necessary documents on the Armenian Question in 1912-1914. In 1915, the collection of documents was published in Petrograd (Reforms 1915), which included, in particular, documents that testify to benevolent attitude of Entente toward Armenian reforms and the anti-Armenian stance of German diplomacy. In that same year

It was only during the fourth session of the conference on June 30 that the opinion of the German envoy was not endorsed by Panfili and Chauber. When Mandelstam demanded that the governing councils of the Armenian state be formed with equal representation of Christians and Muslims, Schoenberg proposed to apply the comparative principle. The representatives of Austria-Hungary and Italy surprisingly supported Schoenberg's defense of Mandelstam. After the hearing, when the German embassy asked for explanations for such behavior, Panfili responded that he was following Ambassador Pallavicini's instructions. The Austrian-Hungarian Embassy felt that the rejection of the fundamental principles of the Russian program had already put the issue of Armenian reforms in a deadlock, so that "compromise on secondary issues" could be achieved.³⁴ By doing so, Pallavicini hoped to avoid the accusations of previously agreed-upon and unified tactics for the failure of Armenian reforms.

The governments England and France also had their share in the blame for the failure of the Yeni-köy negotiations. Although they were allies of Russia, they opposed to Russian monopoly on the Armenian Question. That is why they were not interested in endorsing the Mandelstam project. On June 10 1913, when the British-French-Russian negotiations had just ended, the French ambassador to Constantinople M. Bompard handed over to the Russian side a memorandum on the Armenian reforms, which suggested that Mandelstam's project be adapted to the Turkish program. In particular, the French government considered it appropriate to form two sectors, instead of a single Armenian province, to be headed by the Sultan, without the governors appointed by the states. The French government also opposed the election of provincial assemblies. The M. Bompard Memorandum was in favor of the participation of a Turkish representative in Yeni-köy negotiations.³⁵

The Russian project was similarly treated by the British government. On June 26, the UK Ambassador to St. Petersburg Buchanan received a statement from Foreign Minister Gray to meet with Sazonov and convince Russia that two conditions must be met for the success of Armenian reforms. First, the project must be acceptable to all the powers without a doubt, and second, the nature of the project must be such that the Turkish government is willing to accept it. In other words, Gray suggested that the ambassadors of Constantinople be instructed to make the Turkish program a subject of parallel examination to the Russian program. The program adopted in solidarity of the powers and with the willingness of the Turks, would become a firm guarantee for the non-hatred between the Armenians and the Turks, to prevent the massacres and for

the collection was translated into Armenian and published in Tiflis. The World War I was going on, and in the military operations in the Caucasus, Russia was keen to get the full support of the two parts of Armenians. Although the ratification of the treaties was biased, that is, Russia's benevolent and German denialist stance was underscored; the compilation is an invaluable source for studying the history of the Armenian Question.

³⁴ Mikayelyan 1995: 80.

³⁵ See Kirakosyan 1972: 231-234.

moderate reforms. The forced draft of the reforms, in Gray's view, "would enforce the Ottoman government to take a hostile stance towards it and perhaps take extreme measures, even if ... it was unanimously adopted by the powers".³⁶

Gray thought that if the primary task of the reforms was to protect the Western Armenians from the pressure and massacre, then the proposals made by the Turks should also be considered. He wrote: "Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that the best procedure to follow would be that it should be directed to Constantinople representatives to try to find a standard of reform that is acceptable to both Turkey and the Powers. That is why the two proposed plans should be discussed and not overlooked, as the first aim of the reforms is to ensure that the Armenian and Christian peoples do not deal with them in a very harsh and offensive manner and that they are not slaughtered".³⁷

The concerns of the British Foreign Minister were appropriate, as in the absence of real gains under European control the logic of the Young Turk Government would be purely Turkish, that is, there would be no question of Armenian reforms thus far the empire had Armenian citizens. The Young Turks would accuse the Armenians of Russian interference and take revenge with all the hatred.

Gray's concerns and suggestions, however worrying they were, nevertheless did not affect the path taken by the Russian diplomacy. First, they were long overdue, to be considered during the British-French-Russian negotiations, and second, the Russian government came to a new conclusion after failing the Yeni-köy negotiations and adopted appropriate tactics. The Russian Foreign Minister assessed the situation in a different way. He realized that he was forced to act alone as a result of the denial of his opponents and the passive policy of his allies. In his later memoirs, Sazonov confessed: "Our allies and friends were pursuing ... their goals and in Istanbul they were unreliable helpers".³⁸ The failure of the Yeni-köy negotiations proved that the Russia's main enemy in the Armenian issue is Germany. Therefore, the Russian side decided to come to an agreement with Germany at the price of compromise, and then to force the compromise option on the Turkish government jointly. The new tactics would bypass the Allies' timid support and the unity of opposing armies. Russian diplomacy, by reducing key players in the Armenian issue and clarifying bilateral interests, hoped to hold the key of resolving the problem. Unfortunately, the new Russian tactics ignored Gray's warnings of the need of non-hatred between the Armenians and Turks and preventing the Armenian massacres in such a way, as well as the real danger of the Turkish version of the Armenian Question. After all, the Young Turks could have accepted the Russian-German compromise option with reluctance, thus taking revenge on the Armenians themselves. In that case, who and how would protect the Western Armenian civilian population?

³⁶ Idem: 259-260.

³⁷ Idem: 260.

³⁸ Sazonov 1927: 162.

The policy of the British-French governments on the Armenian issue did not miss the attention of the Young Turk Government, which, using the contradictions between the Powers, helped to defeat the Yeni-köy negotiations by its native Abdulhamid methods. In the name of post-imperial reforms, the tactics of avoiding the Armenian Question were not new to the Young Turks. On March 13, 1913, Mahmud Shevket Pasha's government had adopted the "Provincial Governance Law", the real purpose of which was to prevent the internationalization of the Armenian Question. Said Halim Pasha's government adopted the same approach. The successive Ittihadist governments had no desire at all to deal with the Western Armenian population, even with elementary problems. If the Young Turks had a desire to reform the empire, they would have had the means and sufficient time to do so by 1913. Surprisingly, it was only when the Armenian Question reached the threshold of internationalization that the Ittihadists wanted to make post-imperial reforms. The Yeni-köy conference was not an exception, during which the Young Turks again launched a post-Imperial reform program. On June 22, 1913, the newly appointed Minister of the Interior, Tala'at Bey³⁹, was enjoying the privilege of serving as a Minister. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) issued a broad statement on the need for reforms in eastern Anatolia. Tala'at first presented the plight of the population and then concluded: "The incidents, murders, crimes and oppressions complained of by the peoples of the eastern provinces have so far been the result of insecurity in these places, where the robbers, kidnapping of girls or young women have remained unpunished; a number of *aghas* or *beys* also levied illegal taxes".⁴⁰ The minister said the government had firmly decided to eliminate all the causes of public discontent.⁴¹

If the Turkish government really wanted to improve the status of Western Armenians, then the moment was very convenient. It just needed to go from statements and promises to action. But it turned out that Tala'at's goal was to evade European control rather than to carry out reforms. On June 30, Tala'at summoned Grigor Zohrap and demanded that Poghos Nubar Pasha, head of the Armenian National Delegation in Europe, be invited to Constantinople and renounce European control. He said: "We must oppose absolute European control to the end. This is our duty and there are already things that are beyond our will. But we are really in control, the foot of the ambassadors of Russia and England is always on the Sublime Porte. They get interested, they dictate, they demand, and we can't tell them not to intervene. So it really does exist and it should have."

Coming to the question of the governor general, we will invite them with a very high roll of England, if need be. We must make every sacrifice to bring them. We have

³⁹ Following the assassination of Mahmud Shevket Pasha on June 2, 1913, a new government was formed under the leadership of Egyptian Prince Said Halim Pasha, where Tala'at took over the position of Minister of the Interior.

⁴⁰ Buzandion, 24. 07 1913.

⁴¹ Idem.

to invite people of very high political standing, and they should not come without the consent of their state - this is the favor of the Powers".⁴²

Zohrap said he was surprised by such a proposal. He stated he was uninformed and unaware that he could solve the problem. As for inviting Poghos Nubar to Constantinople, Zohrap explained that he was appointed by the Catholicos of All Armenians and has the power to negotiate only with European governments.⁴³ Other meetings with Tala'at and other Western Armenian figures to resolve the issue of reform within the framework of Armenian-Turkish relations were also in vain. The discrepancies in the Young Turks' speech and deeds in the Western Armenian public and political circles gave birth to a great deal of mistrust that could only be resolved through genuine reform. Therefore, the solution of the problem of Armenian reforms within the framework of the Armenian-Turkish relations depended entirely on the Young Turks.

Thus, Yeni-köy's negotiations turned into fruitless debates as a result of German, Austrian-Hungarian and Italian outright denial of the Mandelstam project, the two-way behavior of England and France and the Turkish government's policy of overthrowing the Armenian reforms. At this stage of weighing up the Armenian question, the Russian diplomacy suffered a temporary defeat and had to stop the Yeni-köy negotiations, which, in fact, was turned into "worthless comedy".⁴⁴

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Translated from the Armenian by Vahram Gharakhanyan

⁴² Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, archive, document n. 288, p. 183.

⁴³ Idem.

⁴⁴ Sazonov 1927: 172.