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U S J o u r n a l

TÜRKİYE-VATICAN RELATIONS DURING THE TURKISH NATIONAL STRUGGLE (1918-1923)

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ABSTRACT

Relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Vatican predated the Conquest of Constantinople. Following the Conquest of Constantinople, the westward advance of the Turks caused considerable concern in the Vatican. The Turkish conquest of Constantinople, in particular, prompted calls within the Vatican for a crusade against the Turks. In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire's desire to prevent France—which had assumed the protection of Catholics—from interfering in its internal affairs necessitated the development of relations with the Vatican. The bilateral relations that ensued reached their zenith during World War I and the Armistice of Mudros. However, the French factor, along with certain concerns, prevented the establishment of official diplomatic relations. Following the signing of the Armistice of Mudros, the Vatican provided the greatest support to the Ottoman Empire during negotiations concerning the partition of Türkiye in Western capitals. In the correspondence between Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the leader of the Turkish National Struggle, and the Vatican, the Pope's commitment to protecting the rights of Christians in the East was acknowledged by Turkish authorities. Although the Vatican did not officially participate in the Lausanne Conference, it pursued a highly effective policy in safeguarding the rights of Eastern Christians.

Key Words: Türkiye, Ottoman, Vatican, Papacy, Mustapha Kemal Pasha.

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U S J o u r n a l

MİLLİ MÜCADELE'DE TÜRKİYE-VATIKAN İLİŞKİLERİ (1918-1923)

ÖZET

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile Vatikan arasındaki ilişkiler İstanbul'un Fethi öncesine kadar uzanıyordu. İstanbul'un Fethi ile birlikte Türklerin batıya doğru ilerlemesi Vatikan'ı endişelendirmişti. Özellikle İstanbul'un Türkler tarafından fethi, Vatikan'da Türklere karşı bir Haçlı Seferi çağrısına yol açmıştır. XIX. yüzyılda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Katoliklerin koruyuculuğunu üstlenen Fransa'nın kendi iç işlerine karışmasını engelleme endişesi Vatikan ile ilişkilerin geliştirilmesini zorunlu kılmıştır. Başlayan ikili ilişkiler I. Dünya Savaşı ve Mondros Mütarekesi sırasında zirveye ulaşmıştır. Ancak Fransız faktörü, bazı kaygılarla birlikte resmi diplomatik ilişkilerin başlatılmasını engellemiştir. Mondros Mütarekesi'nin imzalanmasıyla birlikte Batı başkentlerinde Türkiye'nin paylaşılması için yapılan görüşmelerde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na en büyük desteği Vatikan vermiştir. Türk Millî Mücadelesinin lideri Mustafa Kemal Paşa ile Vatikan arasındaki yazışmalarda, Papa'nın Doğu'daki Hristiyanların haklarının korunması konusundaki hassasiyeti Türk yetkililer tarafından dikkate alınmıştır. Vatikan, Lozan Konferansı'na resmen katılmamış olsa da Doğu Hristiyanlarının haklarının korunması konusunda oldukça etkili bir politika izlemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı, Türkiye, Vatikan, Papalık, Mustafa Kemal Paşa.

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Introduction

The advance of the Turks towards the West worried the Eastern Roman Empire. Eastern Roman Emperor John V Palaiologos, who was a Catholic, wrote a letter to the Pope against the Turks on December 15, 1355. In his letter, John V presented a plan to convert his people to the Catholic faith. Additionally, John V requested fifteen ships, 500 knights, and 1,000 infantries. The Pope, who received the letter, contacted Venice, the King of Cyprus, and the Knights of Rhodes and asked them to help Eastern Rome in order to carry out the Crusade. The Pope made efforts to bring the Genoese, who were in alliance with the Ottoman Sultan Orhan, into the Crusader alliance. The Crusader Army, which landed in Gallipoli with Venetian ships, was not successful against the Turks¹. Another turning point was the conquest of Constantinople which was met with sadness in Vatican. Following the conquest of Constantinople, the letter allegedly sent to the Pope, the representative of Jesus, with the signature of Mehmed the Conqueror², "the successor and avenger of Hector and the other Trojans", was read everywhere. The Pope asked his cardinals to visit Naples, Florence, Venice and Milan and to unite against the Turkish threat. The Pope's call for a war tax from the entire Christian world was not answered, and the war preparations were inconclusive³. After Sultan Mehmed removed Venice from the north of the Aegean Sea, he targeted Rhodes, Italy and the Papacy. Political turmoil in Italy facilitated Sultan Mehmed's intervention. The fleet sent to Southern Italy under the command of Gedik Ahmet Pasha conquered Otranto on July 26, 1480. Otranto Castle was turned into a base and raids began to be made in the surrounding areas. This expedition was considered the beginning of the conquest of Rome. The Pope even considered leaving Rome and fleeing. The spirit of the Crusade was revived to save Otranto in Europe. But with the death of Sultan Mehmed, the conquest of Italy was interrupted⁴. In the following centuries, attempts to organize a Crusade, such as the one led by the Vatican under Pope Clement VIII, were unsuccessful.⁵

In the 19th century, Ottoman-Vatican relations progressed positively. The personal positive attitudes of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the incumbent Popes, as well as internal and external dynamics, were particularly influential in this. One of the issues that came into prominence in the bilateral relations was the Armenian issue. Although the Papacy criticized the Ottomans for the Armenian issue, it does not appear to have adopted a harsh stance compared to other European countries. Relations with the Vatican, as they were before, continued unofficially but around friendship during the period of Sultan Abdulhamid II. Although Vatican maintained the policy of not accepting the Ottoman Ambassadors sent before Rome, some peculiar negotiations had been carried out with the consulate of Rome. The Ottoman Empire

¹ Halil İnalcık, "Osmanlı Sultanı Orhan (1324-1362) Avrupa'da Yerleşme (1324-1362)", *Belleten* 73, no. 266, (April 2009), 77-108.

² In the essays, Montaigne touched upon the relationship between Mehmed II and the Papacy. "Besides this, what glory can be compared with this? There is nothing so alive in the mouths of men as his name and his Works; nothing so well-known and accepted as Troy, Helen, and his wars, which perhaps never existed. Our children are still called by the names he invented more than three thousand years ago. Who doesn't know Hector and Achilles? Not only certain private families but most nations seek their origin in his fictions. Mehmed, the second of that name, emperor of the Turks, writing to Pope Pius II, says: *"I am astonished how the Italians league themselves against me, seeing that we have our common origin in the Trojans, and that I like them, have an interest in avenging the blood of Hector on the Greeks, whom they are favoring against me."* See, Michel De Montaigne, *The Complete Works Essay, Travel Journal, Letters*, translated by Donald M. Frame, (Toronto: Everymans Library 2003), 692.

³ Nicolae Jorga, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi*, (İstanbul Yeditepe Yayınları, 2009), 51-52.

⁴ Halil İnalcık, "II. Mehmed", (DİA) (*The Encyclopaedia of İslam*) 28, (Ankara: 2003), 403.

⁵ Trandafir G. Djuvara, *Türkiye'nin Paylaşılması Hakkında Yüz Proje*, (İstanbul: Gündoğan Yayınları 1999), 100-106.

entered World War I in October 1914, and a new period began in relations. Since France had long been the patron of the Catholic people living in the Ottoman Empire, the abolition of the Capitulations led to a differentiation of relations with the Papacy⁶. The departure of the French Ambassador from Istanbul due to the war also created a new development. Requests for visits from the Vicar of the Pope in Istanbul were conveyed to Ottoman authorities through the French Ambassador, in accordance with a long-standing tradition. This process brought about the need for the Ottomans to develop their relations with the Vatican⁷. Due to these newly developed situations, papal nuncios were able to meet with Ottoman authorities and join the official ceremonies directly. During the wartime period, diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Vatican couldn't be realized due to some concerns. The Vatican did not initiate direct political relations with the Ottoman Empire because it did not want to worsen its relations with France⁸. During the World War I, the Vatican also tried to contribute to world peace. Pope Benedict XV sent a letter in 1917 to Sultan Mehmet V calling for the end of the war. The Turkish Sultan also wrote a letter to the Pope in response⁹. Despite the Pope's best efforts to mediate between the belligerent states, the war continued for another year.

1. The Greek-Turkish War from the Vatican's Perspective and Relations

During the Mudros Armistice years, Turkey-Vatican relations had followed a very good course. Thus, Emmanuel Carasso Effendi, a prominent figure of the Committee of Union and Progress, was arrested. His family appealed to Angelo Dolci, Apostolic Vicar of Constantinople from 1914 to 1922, for Carasso's release because he had fallen ill in the damp conditions of his imprisonment. Thereupon, Angelo Dolci made an appeal to the Grand Vizier for Carasso Effendi, who was being detained in the police directorate. Dolci met with the Grand Vizier and requested that Carasso be transferred to Allied hospitals or released under judicial supervision¹⁰.

The Vatican, which had been reluctant to establish diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire during World War I, changed its policy during the armistice. Although the Pope's deputy, Monsignor Dolci, expressed his desire to establish official relations in a meeting with the Sublime Porte bureaucrats, this request was rejected by his interlocutors. Since the Ottoman Empire had accepted France as the protector of Catholics in its own lands, it could no longer anger France. Moreover, France, which emerged victorious from the war, once

⁶ Ahmet Türkan, "Turkey-Vatican Relations from the Ottomans to the Republic", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5, no. 5 (May 2015): 152-153.

⁷ Türkan, "Turkey-Vatican Relations from the Ottomans to the Republic", 154.

⁸ Rinaldo Marmara, *Vatikan Gizli Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında Türkiye ile Diplomatik İlişkilere Doğru*, (İstanbul: Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2012), 67-75.

⁹ Turkish Presidency Ottoman Archive (BOA), Council of Ministers (MV), 258/27. At the beginning of the First World War, when Pope Benoit XVI heard about the Franco-Russian alliance, he expressed his satisfaction and said that this would help the unification of the Churches. However, the Vatican was worried about the possibility that the Russians could dominate Constantinople and Hagia Sophia and then gain unrivalled control of Jerusalem and the holy places. Thinking of these consequences, the Vatican sided against Russia in World War I. See İleri, 3 June 1922, 2.

¹⁰ Sabah, 11 February 1919, 2. Monsignor Dolci, the Pope's Vicar in Constantinople, began making efforts to have a statue of the Pope erected in Constantinople in recognition of her efforts for world peace. See, Atı, 17 December 1918, 2. The dedication of the monument erected in honour of Pope Benedict at Constantinople to commemorate his work during the war, was an event of great impressiveness and international character. The ceremony was attended by the Heir Apparent, the Sultan, the Imperial Prince and Princesses, all the officials of the government, the general staffs of the army and the navy, many senators, the High Commissioners of France, England, the USA and Greece. See, The Perth W.A. Record, 18 March 1922, pp.5. This statue was erected by public subscription in Constantinople. The Sultan of Turkey headed the list. Other subscribers were the Grand Rabbi of Turkey and the Armenian, Gregorian and Georgian Patriarchs. See, New Britain Daily Herald, 1 February, 1922, 9; Also See, Boston Sunday Post, 29 January, 1922, 44.

again assumed the protection of Catholics. Another reason for the failure to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican was that places with a large Catholic population, such as Syria and Lebanon, had ceased to be part of the Ottoman Empire¹¹.

During the Mudros Armistice years, negotiations for the division of the Ottoman Empire were ongoing between the representatives of the Entente Powers. On December 11, 1919, during the Allied talks in London, Venizelos proposed that the Turkish Sultanate should be given a status similar to that of the Vatican. According to him, Constantinople should remain the religious center of Islam and Bursa should be the capital of the Turkish Sultanate. A small guard corps, like the Pope has in the Vatican, could be allowed. In the ongoing negotiations, Lloyd George supported Venizelos' proposals on Constantinople¹². The situation in Constantinople was also discussed in the House of Commons. On 26 February 1920 William Ormsby Gore said that the Sultan could only be allowed to stay in Constantinople on the same terms under which the Pope remains at the Vatican. The Caliphate could be "Vaticanized." The Caliph might be there, but he might have no real effective dominion as regards the Straits. According to him, the Caliph had to have no power to shut the gates, and no military power at all. Earl Winterton said that it was unfair to Indian Muslims today to insist on the policy of turning the Sultan out of Constantinople and depriving him of his power there, because it was a question on which these Muslims felt just as strongly as Catholics felt on the subject of the Vatican and Rome. Mr. Oman said that it was possible to leave a decorative Turkish Sultan there in the same way as the Pope remains in Rome, without any military power except a small guard.¹³

Considering the political situation in Turkey, and the part which Islamic religion had played in the decision of the Supreme Council to allow the Sultan to remain at Constantinople, the lecture given by the Rev. H. Boys, of North Cadbury, on "The Church of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople," at the Digby Memorial Hall, was of more than ordinary interest. For five years (1870-1875) the lecturer had resided in Turkey, and had a comprehensive knowledge of his subject and of the trend of events in Turkey. The Rev. H. Boys, in opening, referred to the prevailing situation in Turkey, and to the probable usefulness of the lecture in view of the visit the next day of the Assyrian Ambassadors. It was, he said, extraordinarily creditable that so many Christians in Asia Minor had held fast to their religion when they might have escaped cruelty and oppression simply by becoming Muslim. If all the facts were known they in England would not tolerate that the Christians should be plundered and massacred at the whim of the Turk. After showing views of ancient temples at Athens and of places sacred to Christian people in the Holy Land, the lecturer turned to the Church of Hagia Sophia, formerly a Christian Church, but since 1453 a Muslim Mosque, which was begun by Constantine in 330 A.D. on the site of ancient Byzantium, and re-built in 415 by Theodosius, and again, in 538-568, by Justinian. The lecturer alluded to the reasons which it was stated

¹¹ Marmara, *Vatikan Gizli Arşiv Belgeleri Işığında Türkiye ile Diplomatik İlişkilere Doğru*, 111-113.

¹² E. L. Woodward, Rohan Butler, (Edited), *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, Ser.1, Vol. 2, (Dec 11, 1919), (London 1946), Notes of a Conversation at 10, No. 600. In the Senate in January, US President Wilson described Turkish Istanbul as the German Alsace Lorraine. See, *The Times*, 18 October 1918, pp.5. The Vatican, which did not lose its interest in Turkey even during the years of the Armistice of Mudros, was following the Turkish-Greek War in Anatolia. In French public opinion, another Catholic country, the war waged by Greece was characterised as "Constantine's New Crusade". According to the French, Greece, as Britain's sergeant-major, was helping British imperialism to establish itself in the straits. See, Yahya Akyüz, *Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı ve Fransız Kamuoyu (1919-1922)*, (Ankara Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1988), 266. Türkiye would send a minister to the Vatican. It was announced. This was the first time Sultan affiliated with Christendom. The Sultan initiated the step as a mark of gratitude for the Pope's financial and other aid to Turkish war prisoners. See, *New Britain Herald*, 2 September 1920, 16.

¹³ <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1920/feb/26/turks-and-constantinople>.

influenced the Supreme Council in deciding that the Sultan should remain at Constantinople. There was the so-called fear of offending the Muslims in India and Egypt. Did such an argument come with good grace from England, who had driven the Mohammedans from Damascus, taken possession of Baghdad and the administration of Mesopotamia, with its valuable oil wells, and quietly took possession of Egypt? Did England have the slightest consideration for the feelings of the Mohammedan World in those matters. Now, when there was no question of oil wells, or of safe-guarding the road to India, but only the lives of the faithful Greeks and Armenians. They suddenly became very scrupulous. These hypocritical reasons for denying to the Greeks their own church was but throwing dust in people's eyes. They didn't want to drive the Sultan out of Constantinople or take anything from the Turk which was really his own, but they wanted the Turkish rule to cease. The lecturer said he couldn't help feeling that the whole influence of the Roman Catholic Church was thrown against the redemption of the Church of Hagia Sophia. When the audience was preparing to disperse, the Rev. Father Grant, a Catholic priest at Sherborne, rose and protested against the allegation that there had been interference from the Vatican. He requested that the Rev. H. Boys furnish proofs of his charges. The lecturer said he couldn't prove the statement, but he had lived in the country, and knew and deplored the bitter feelings of hostility which existed. He honestly believed that the influence of the Vatican had gone against the restoration of the Church of St. Sophia to the Greek Church.¹⁴

Monsieur François Stern, a Romanian national who was recommended to Mr. Russel, was the British ambassador to Switzerland. According to telegraph from Mr. Russel to Earl Curzon on August 9, 1920, Mr. Stern, had proofs in his possessions that Italian Government had encouraged and was assisting Mustafa Kemal Pasha and was fomenting anti-British intrigues in Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the East; and that the Vatican had associated itself with this policy and was moreover encouraging the Sinn Fein cause and intriguing with Bolsheviks.¹⁵

Stern made an offer to mediate peace between Britain's Government and Mustafa Kemal Pasha. The emissary was a young Romanian named François Stern, who during the war had been employed by Britain's Government. M. Stern was invited to a meeting on 3 September 1920 between Earl Curzon, Sir G. Buchanan and Admiral J. de Robeck on the war in Turkey. Mr Stern, who also met with officials of the Ankara Government, wanted to draw attention to the close relationship between the Turks and Italians. All communications, he said, between Mustafa Kemal and his supporters in Europe passed through Italy. The Italian Government was strengthened in this pro-Turkish policy by the Vatican, which was anxious to use all means at its disposal in order to counter the activities of the Orthodox Patriarchate, which was now deriving great support from the Hellenic Government. M. Stern indeed (he stated that he was himself a Catholic) went so far as to say that the propaganda organization of the Vatican, which was very efficient, had proceeded to promote Sinn Fein disturbances in Ireland a year ago when the presence of the Greeks in Constantinople became a serious possibility.¹⁶ The propaganda organization of the Vatican was immensely strong and in order to prevent the

¹⁴ The Western Gazette, 5 March 1920, 8.

¹⁵ Bilal Şimşir, *British Documents on Atatürk II*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1975), 249. Mr. Lynn asked the Prime Minister in house of commons on 11 December 1919 whether the British Government had made any representations to the Vatican with regard to the campaign of murder that was being carried on in Ireland; whether the Vatican had refused to interfere; and whether the Government was now in a position to say when the British envoy would be withdrawn? See, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1920/aug/09/vatican-campaign-of-murder#S5CV0133P0_19200809_HOC_167.

¹⁶ Butler, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Ser. 1, Vol. 13, Reference: [E 10154/2569/44]. (Sep 3, 1920), London 1946, Despatch No. 808 to Rome; No. 701. On this account, the Vatican paradoxically enough, favoured Moscow to a certain extent. See, Şimşir, *British Documents on Atatürk*, II, 262.

Greek obtaining Constantinople and Hagia Sofia, the Vatican went to the length of supporting Sinn Fein and Egyptian and Indian Nationalist agitators.¹⁷

The whole situation had grown out of the decision of the British to back Greek claims both in Thrace and in the Smyrna district. At the close of the World War the British determined to be done with the Turks, reverse their old policy and back the Greeks. In their scheme the Greeks were to regain not only their ancient colonies upon the western side of Asia Minor but also Constantinople, the former center of the Byzantine Empire. Greece was a promising nation to support and the British could hope that by establishing Greece in the eastern end of the Mediterranean, they would have a useful ally¹⁸.

2. Vatican-Mustafa Kemal Pasha Correspondence and Anatolian Christians

During the Armistice of Mudros, the British Armenian Committee submitted a memorandum to the British Government. According to the memorandum, if the Armenian-majority areas were not placed under American mandate, they must be liberated from Turkish rule and Armenia must be completely cut off from the Ottoman Empire. For years in the eastern regions of Turkey, the Turkish governments had deliberately incited Armenian hostility. An independent Armenian state separate from Turkey, excluding the Armenian unit centered in Yerevan in Russia, was to be established. Mustafa Kemal's rebellious, violent government was building its future on Armenian soil.¹⁹ The Times reported that 300,000 Armenian refugees in Turkish Armenia had been homeless for five years and were struggling with poverty. Moreover, according to The Times, Armenian refugees could not return to their homes and lands because they would be subjected to persecution and massacres.²⁰ In the meantime, two members of the British Armenian Committee traveled to Rome for support. The delegation was welcomed in a very cordial atmosphere by Cardinal Gasparri, the Vatican foreign minister, and learned that the Vatican had sent a telegram to Mustafa Kemal Pasha²¹. In a meeting with Gabriel Noradounghian, President of the Armenian National Delegation, Cardinal Gasparri assured Noradounghian that Pope Pius XI would follow everything that concerned the future of the Armenian nation²².

At the meeting of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey held on March 12, 1921, Muhtar Bey, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, took the floor. Muhtar Bey started his speech by saying that he was proud to hear from a man who occupied the highest spiritual authority in Christendom that "the most stable and organized government in the East is the Turkish Grand National Assembly". Muhtar Bey stated that a letter had been sent to Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the head of the Assembly, by the Pope, the supreme spiritual head of the Catholic world, and then read Mustafa Kemal Pasha's reply telegram. The letter, signed by Cardinal Gasparri and sent on behalf of the Pope, requested in the name of humanity that the necessary orders be given to ensure the safety of the lives, property, and possessions of the Christians of the Caucasus, Asia Minor, and Anatolia. The letter concluded with the words "it is hoped that compassion and mercy will prevail on all sides after the many difficulties and persecutions to which humanity has been subjected." Mustafa Kemal Pasha began his letter by stating that he had received the Pope's special wishes in favor of the Christians of Anatolia, the Caucasus and Asia Minor. Mustafa Kemal Pasha emphasized that all measures had been taken to ensure that the Christians in all the areas where the influence and sovereignty of the Grand National

¹⁷ Şimşir, *British Documents on Ataturk*, II, 275.

¹⁸ Philadelphia Inquirer, 12 June, 1922, 2.

¹⁹ The Times, 9 January 1920, 14.

²⁰ The Times, 15 January 1920, 8.

²¹ Şimşir, *British Documents on Ataturk*, III, 592-593.

²² The Daily Telegraph, 8 April 1922, 8.

Assembly of Turkey was extended would live in complete security and prosperity. Mustafa Kemal Pasha reminded that the protection of the rights of Christians was also a requirement of Islam. According to Mustafa Kemal Pasha, every precaution was being taken to ensure that the Christians in all the areas where the influence and sovereignty of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey was extended lived in complete tranquility and prosperity. Moreover, peace and security in those parts of the Turkish borders not occupied by any foreign army was an irrefutable fact. On the other hand, Mustafa Kemal Pasha drew attention to his words during the inauguration of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and again on March 1, 1921 in order to show that the policy of the Ankara Government had not changed in this regard. Moreover, Mustafa Kemal Pasha had said the following at the inauguration of the second year of the Turkish Parliament on the April 24, 1920. "The protection of the Greeks and Armenians of Anatolia, and the assurance of their peace, is a fundamental principle admitted by us at all times, so long as they abstain from opposing the will of the nation and the orders of the Government. Even in the face of the criminal aggressions committed by the regular and irregular Armenian forces against our brethren in Cilicia and on our oriental frontiers. We have always held it a first duty of humanity to guarantee the most complete security to the Christians who live tranquilly in the internal part of the country. In these times, in which Anatolia has been surrounded and deprived of all communication with other countries, we have considered that, amongst the essential measures destined to safeguard the highest interests of the country, the protection of the Christian population was in the first rank, and we have given instructions in this sense to all the competent authorities." In his speech for the second session, Mustafa Kemal Pasha stated that the Entente Powers recognized Turkey as a state incapable of living as an independent state. Mustafa Kemal Pasha claimed that the Allied Powers wanted to disintegrate Turkey and enslave the Turkish Nation under the pretext of this perception. The reason that pushed Western states to this perception was the belief that the Turkish Nation was not capable of governing itself. The Turkish Nation had been struggling against a great disaster for a year without any help. Apart from the form of administration to which it had been accustomed for centuries, the Turkish Nation was governing itself in the most civilized, humane way and in accordance with all freedom criteria. Mustafa Kemal Pasha underlined that the Turkish lands invaded by the Allied Powers and the Turkish Nation, isolated from all means of defense, were subjected to uninterrupted destruction, plunder, deportation and atrocities. In addition, Mustafa Kemal Pasha added that the life and property of all non-Muslim elements in Turkey were guaranteed under the protection of Turkish laws and weapons.²³ A very favorable impression had been caused in the Vatican by the telegram received from the Mustapha Kemal Pasha, regarding the treatment of Christians in the territory of Angora.²⁴

The attitudes of the Ankara Government towards the Pope had been very much welcomed by the Vatican. The Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Faith had expressed his complete satisfaction at the way in which the Catholic Church had been treated by the Turks. This valuable recognition of the Turkish Government great tolerance towards members of other faiths, and their religious institutions, would be of much greater significance when it is known that a famous Papal pronouncement made, and afterwards preserved in the Archives of Paris on May 29, 1854, contained the statement: *"The enemies of the Christian Church are not the Turks. But our brothers and sisters in other so-called Christian churches in Turkey. They*

²³ Records of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, Period 1, Meeting Years 2, V. 9, pp. 93-94; The Catholic Herald, 30 April 1921, 3.

²⁴ The Catholic Herald, 30 April 1921, 3.

brought degeneracy into Christianity. They had used Christianity for their wicked political ambitions. Old enemies of the Church want to suppress Christian growth."²⁵

By the way in August 1922, prior to the death of the late Pope, the Vatican was unofficially approached by a prominent Muslim resident of Rome, on the subject of the Greek Orthodox Church in Anatolia. The matter, however didn't arouse much enthusiasm in Vatican circles, and was accordingly dropped. During June, however, it was reported that Celaledin Arif Bey, representative of the Ankara Government to Rome, believing conditions under the present Pope to be more favourable for discussions on this subject, proposed shortly to resume the previous unofficial conversations. To this end, he had sounded the Vatican through Signor Petacci. Celaledin Arif Bey was confining his efforts to paving the way for negotiations, and that he had also been in touch with Cardinal Vico and Monsignor Vercesi. He considered that, before definite progress could be achieved, it would first be necessary to undermine the strong British influence at the Vatican, and that exercised by the Greek representative, Monsignor Papadopoulos. Later, Celaledin Arif Bey had informed the Vatican that the Angora Government was willing to place at the disposal of the Pope its influence among Muslims in Palestine.²⁶

3. Catholic-Orthodox Struggle for Hagia Sophia

One of the most important goals of the Greeks during the Mudros Armistice years was to capture Hagia Sophia in order to complete the ritual that was left unfinished with the conquest of Constantinople. The Greeks, who had been dreaming of this for years, believed that one day Hagia Sophia would be taken back and returned to its former state as a church. That is why the former owner of Pera Palace Hotel, Bodosaki, presented a specially prepared Greek flag to the Greek Patriarchate²⁷. There was also public opinion outside of Turkey on this issue. On April 23, 1919, at a meeting organized by the London Association for the Uniting of Christian Churches and attended by clergy, speeches were made calling for the retaking of Hagia Sophia. At the end of the speeches, a decision was made to turn Hagia Sophia back into a church and a liberation committee was established. However, the British government did not allow the rally that the committee had prepared regarding Hagia Sophia to be held, because it was heard that if the rally was held, the Turks would blow up Hagia Sophia in protest²⁸.

According to Aberdeen Journal, the Turkish problem was more involved than ever. If Constantinople was taken over by the League of Nations, the Vatican wanted the Mosque of Hagia Sophia, because they desired it. The Greeks also wanted the mosque, for the same reason. Turkey itself was quite agreeable to the loss of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine, but would have no interference with its European corner and Asia Minor. The Sultan was reconciled to a mandatory, preferably Britain, provided the mandatory existed for the purposes of assistance and not of control. The Grand Vizier had handed to the Allied representative a magniloquent proposal of reform, especially with regard to Christian minorities, but that was merely a dodge²⁹.

4. Relations After the Turkish Victory Over the Greeks

The influence of the Papacy was effective in the protection of Catholics in the Near East. At the request of Pope Pius XI, Mustapha Kemal Pasha allowed the Catholics of Smyrna to

²⁵ Şimşir, *British Documents on Atatürk*, III, 407.

²⁶ Şimşir, *British Documents on Atatürk*, IV, 362-363.

²⁷ Hülya Toker, *Mütareke Döneminde İstanbul Rumları*, (Ankara: Atase Yayınları, 2006), 98.

²⁸ Selahattin Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar*, (Ankara: Başbakanlık Kültür Müsteşarlığı Yayınları, 1973), 129-130.

²⁹ Aberdeen Journal, 23 January 1920, 4.

remain in that city after he had previously ordered them to leave. When the original order of the Turkish National leader was issued, the Pope, through Cardinal Gasparri, sent a telegram asking that the Christians be permitted to remain in Smyrna under the protection of Archbishop Vallega, who was acting as the special representative of the Holy See. In the meantime, a new instance of the keen interest of the Vatican in the welfare of the people of the Near East was given in the appointment of Archbishop Francesco Marmaggi as Apostolic Delegate to Constantinople. The new delegate was instructed to do everything in his power to bring about the conclusion of a just and equitable peace, and it was felt that the talent for such affairs, which he manifested while Nuncio at Bucharest, would be valuable in assisting all parties to come to an understanding in the present emergency. Anticipating that efforts, was made to bring about peace, would be successful, Archbishop Marmaggi was entrusted also with the administration of relief to the victims of the conflict. The Pope had already donated generously to this cause. One of the first acts of the new delegate would be a visit to the Archbishop of Smyrna, where he would gain first-hand information concerning conditions in that city³⁰.

Representations were made to the Near East Conference by the Holy See on behalf of the Constantinople Christians. Monsignor Maglione, the Nuncio of the Catholic Church in Switzerland, presented a communication to the President of the conference asked that prompt and efficacious methods had to be adopted to protect the various Christians of Constantinople, whose situation, the communication stated, had become alarming. The communication from the Vatican presented by Monsignor Maglione was as followed: "The Christians of European nationality are panic-stricken. Many have left, and many others have not the means to leave. Those who wish to leave the city must promise in writing never to return. Their goods are sequestered, and all possessions of Europeans and of religious congregations are in the greatest peril. There is general fear of the arrival of irregular bands and of disastrous consequences which may follow. The Armenians are terror-stricken. They have no refuge, and are even more exposed than the others. In bringing these facts to the attention of the Lausanne Conference, which was summoned to establish peace in the Orient, the Holy See begs it most earnestly, in the name of humanity, to adopt measures in the most prompt and efficacious manner to reassure the populations which already have been so cruelly stricken." Pope Pius' appeal brought an immediate response from İsmet Pasha, head of the Turkish peace delegation. İsmet Pasha issued a statement declaring that the situation of the Christians in Constantinople was not such as to cause uneasiness and charging the Greeks with the circulation of alarming reports in order to influence the Lausanne negotiations in favour of Greece. Copies of the Papal communication were sent to Delegate Barrere of France, Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary, and Marquis di Garroni, the President of the three main commissions of the conference. İsmet Pasha continued his words as follows:

"During the conference, the Greek delegation has proposed an exchange of the Turkish and Greek minority populations between the two countries, but wishes to exempt the Greeks of Constantinople. The purpose of the Greek delegation was to have Greek refugees occupy the homes of the Turks now living in Greek territory and to expel the Muslims. It is logical that the Greeks in Constantinople be subjected to the same exchange as the others. It is easy to understand that the circulation of reports relative to the pretended insecurity of the Greeks in Constantinople is a Greek maneuver to exempt the Constantinople Greeks from exchange. These indefensibly false reports

³⁰ The Catholic Telegraph, 12 October 1922, pp. 1. Prominent officials in the Greek army and ministers were arrested. The Vatican is to make a definite protest to the Greek Government against the execution of the former Greek ministers. See, The Evening Telegram, St. Johns Newfoundland, 1 December 1922, pp. 10.

are not supported by the facts. The Holy See has, under the circumstances extremely difficult and in periods of even greater confusion, repeatedly manifested its satisfaction at the treatment to given Christians. We can certify that this same treatment now is guaranteed to the Christian element and that the rumors circulated at this moment are designed to influence the negotiations in the interest of the Greeks.”³¹

In October 1923, Türkiye’s ambassador to Rome, Suat Bey, had a meeting with the Vatican Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cardinal Gasparri, in the Vatican. Suat Bey, who was received very politely, learned from Gasparri that the 10 million francs that the Italian government had received from Greece as compensation were sent to Constantinople with a delegation to be distributed to the Greek and Armenian refugees. Suat Bey said that there were no Greek or Armenian refugees within the borders of Turkey; on the contrary, there were thousands of Muslim refugees who had escaped from Greece. According to Suat Bey, such a commission should have gathered and conducted research at any point in Thessaloniki and Greece. Suat Bey expressed in a suitable manner that the Turkish government would not allow the commission to work. Gasparri, who welcomed Suat Bey’s opinion, said that the delegation would be informed. Meanwhile, Gasparri added during the meeting that he was not in favor of French protection over Catholic churches.³²

Although the Holy See isn’t represented officially at the Lausanne Congress, the Holy See is very anxious that a durable peace should come about as a result of the Conference. Very considerable Roman Catholic interests were involved in the neighborhood of Constantinople itself, there were considerable numbers of Greek Catholics grouped under the jurisdiction of Bishop Calavassy, who had been appointed to this post by the late Pope a year before. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople felt the Christian position to be so threatening as to warrant his appealing to the Allied Powers for protection. The official position taken up by the Vatican was that a peaceful solution to this Near Eastern problem could be found only in Allied agreement. Towards the Turks, the attitude of the Holy See was that stability was the best thing for Turkish interests; and that the principal condition making for stability was respecting and safeguarding of the rights and liberties of the Christians. The Holy See wasn’t interested either in oil concessions or in widening spheres of political influence.³³

Conclusion

The Eastern Roman Empire, concerned about the Turks advancing westward, asked for help from the Vatican. The Vatican’s efforts to respond to this call for help did not yield any definitive results. Vatican-Türkiye relations had followed a positive course, especially since the 19th century, leading to the beginning of political relations. The Ottoman Empire’s aim in initiating political relations with the Vatican was to break the France’s power over Catholics in Türkiye. The peak period of Vatican-Türkiye relations was during World War I. Indeed, the unilateral removal of capitulations by the Ottoman Empire affected Catholic institutions under French auspices. Due to France’s sensitivity, diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Vatican could not be established. Despite everything, the Vatican had increased its influence over Catholics in Turkey. During the Armistice of Mudros years, the Vatican’s attempt to start diplomatic relations failed. After the armistice, while Western powers were dividing up the Ottoman Empire, the Vatican was one of the few states that strongly supported keeping Ottoman territories intact, especially in opposition to Greek claims. The friendly relations that

³¹ Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, 6 December 1922, 1.

³² Presidency of the Republic of Turkey Directorate of State Archives Republican Archives (BCA), 30.10.236.594.9/0.0. 22.10.1923.

³³ Adelaide Southern Cross, 12 January 1923, 2.

continued during the years of the National Struggle were reflected in the correspondence between Mustafa Kemal Pasha and the Pope. The sensitivity that the Vatican displayed towards Christians in Turkey was taken into consideration by the Turkish authorities. Vatican-Turkey relations continued to follow a very good course after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.

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