

The World in 1915 and its Aftermath

Oleg Kuznetsov*

Yusuf Sarıncay: Now, I would like to give the floor to Professor Oleg Kuznetsov. Dr. Kuznetsov taught at various universities, especially in Russian educational institutions. He currently works as a professor at the Azerbaijan University of Languages in Baku. His work is on the Russian army, military history, and especially on Armenian terrorism. I give the floor to him by quoting one of his phrases: “Terror is the practice of the Armenian nationalist ideology.”

Oleg Kuznetsov: Gentlemen, thank you for giving me this opportunity. You have allowed me to participate in such a comprehensive, important meeting – thank you. Likewise, I would like to thank the official institutions of the Republic of Türkiye. I can express my own opinion, my view here, and my point of view differs from that of many Russian Federation official historians, and it becomes important to express my opinion here. This is also a difficult mission here. It is imperative to rationally strike a balance between history and populism or among political conjunctures. I would like to express my opinion about what happened in 1915 not only in the Ottoman (Empire) but also in the whole world, as far as I know.

The First World War was an event bearing universal effects, and, therefore, it affected human beings, and if we look at it in this sense,

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it also had a universal and uniform feature. These were similar events in different countries. First of all, I want to talk about military crimes in different countries. This emerged in the First Balkan War in 1912, and, eventually, the international commission was formed. It was founded by the Carnegie Institute in America. Representatives of European countries joined this, and they started to address military crimes, the military crimes committed in the Balkans. Pavel Milyukov from the Russian Empire was also a member. He was also an opposition leader and from the Democrat party group; still, he was among the authors of the report. This report was published in Geneva in 1915; let me see, I will show it on the screen. This report was published in Geneva in 1915. However, this did not attract much attention because of the events of the First World War. When I saw this, I saw something clearly. If we consider the first genocide in a legal context, if we evaluate it according to the Nuremberg decisions, the first victims of genocide were the Turks in the Balkans because they were expelled from Macedonia. They were expelled from Greece during the war, and there are many documents from that period to prove it. Such crimes prove that the events that happened in 1915 are not specific to that period. The previous events occurred as specific events. Collective losses have occurred previously. The events of 1915 were, in fact, ordinary for the period. As my Dear Colleagues stated earlier, many countries all over the world carried out exiles on the basis of the nation. They drove people of different nationalities from their lands. They did this due to military security concerns to ensure their territories' security; indeed, there was exile also within the Russian Empire in 1915. Germans, Jews, many people from the Western provinces were sent to the Ural Region, and, likewise, the Muslim population was exiled from the Caucasus, and the French were exiled from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

One of the interesting points here is the event in South Africa. There were soldiers in the colonies under the German armies. There were 900 white German soldiers in Namibia. The rest of the army was made up of indigenous soldiers fighting against South Africa's dominion. They fought against Britain at that time, and the English, that is, the British, were ruthless in South Africa. The events that took place in Prussia, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman [Empire] pale in

comparison to this event. Such brutal events happened, but this does not come to the fore. Nobody talks about them because the practice at that time was an everyday event, and everybody took measures in the meantime to ensure their own security. Similarly, the second issue that emerged from the events of 1915 was that all warring countries essentially used their own men on the opposing land. This event was very common on the Caucasian Front. Of course, I do not know how the Turkish party would evaluate these events, but in 1914, the Ottoman army and the Russian army took action. Local elements also supported the Russian army. Here, the religious element was used very actively during the First World War. All of the contending parties used this religious element. In 1916, riots broke out in the Russian Empire in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic in Chechnya, and the Orenburg Cossack troops were employed to suppress it. They received awards and medals for their heroism or their brutality, that is, for doing their job effectively in this uprising. In this context, we can say that the Armenians in the Russian Imperial troops were used against the Ottoman Empire on the Caucasian Front during the First World War. Likewise, there were troops established with the people of the Russian Empire in the Ottoman army; for example, there were Azerbaijanis. In other words, people from Muslim regions joined the ranks of the Ottoman army. We see this in the South Caucasus. So, such events were normal for that time. National troops were not only composed of Armenians in Russia. For example, there was the Polish unit; there was the Czech Kosovo unit. For example, there was Admiral Kolchak in the civil war environment. Thus, this was a common practice in the world at that time. On the one hand, it was done to undermine the opponent's power and use its own resources economically to strengthen its own power, and such events were understandable and acceptable under the First World War conditions. Therefore, no one saw this as something extraordinary. This is why the events here, on Ottoman lands, were not something different from what happened in other countries.

I want to emphasize; unfortunately, the human brain, the human imagination, is incapable of viewing what happened in the past century or two centuries ago in terms of historical events or in a realistic manner because we begin to apply our inherited understanding to events



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that occurred over a century ago. As you know, antibiotics and medicines are used today. These began to appear after 1943. Before penicillin was invented, the losses because of medical problems in a war environment were always three to four times the casualties in war. Casualties due to medical problems were three to four times more than the casualties at the front. In other words, today's wars have no casualties due to medical reasons, and if there is a conflict, a soldier dies at the front. However, then it was a very different situation. People lost their lives due to even weather conditions. In other words, people were dying because of the conditions rather than the war, the conflict itself. The events of 1915 were essentially a product of state policies. The policies implemented by all states brought about the events. That is, a certain number of people died naturally under those conditions, and there was no medicine at the time. As previously stated, people inevitably lost their lives since penicillin was not yet discovered and epidemics occurred. In other words, biological and natural factors influenced the death and loss rates of individuals. Let's assume that the soldiers made their way to their medical corps. However, civilians lacked their medical units, and the army provided this service to itself. In other words, people had to rely on their resources to survive. Unfortunately, in the modern world, these issues are not brought to light or considered. Understanding this fact has a significant impact on our understanding of the events of that era. For instance, we are well aware that two of the three Ottoman corps sent to Caucasia in 1914 perished from exposure to the cold. When the spring of 1915 came, the frozen corpses began to thaw. Of course, the corpses provided an ideal spreading ground for a cholera outbreak, and the death of people from different ethnic groups in Eastern Anatolia in 1915 was inextricably linked to this outbreak. In other words, they died as a result of health complications. So, to say that this is a 'state policy' is ridiculous because it was not only Armenians who died here but people of other nationalities as well. Of course, the Armenian side pursues its own political goals in an ideological sense and says that only their own people suffered. They never consider what happened to other good neighbours, and we can ask a question here. Which ideology is the so-called Armenian genocide mentioned here based on? We know this very well. Nobody knew what genocide was after the First World War. If there isn't even a term or a word for it, we can point out when the idea emerged. The bibliography of Candan Badem was

previously published in Türkiye. A bibliography of 4,500 books on the Turkish issue was compiled here. I have this bibliography in my library. I checked them as well as the titles of the books. When were the Armenian genocide allegations first raised? Not even after the Second World War. This happened much later. The Armenian genocide allegations started to be mentioned in the mid-60s. It was invented at that time, and two factors were behind it. One of them was that Türkiye entered NATO. It emerged because of this. The second factor was the deployment of American rockets against the Soviets on Turkish territory, and when this occurred in the early 1960s, two significant events occurred in Soviet Armenia. In 1962, the Armenian Communist Party decided to construct a mausoleum. They used this to pursue their claims against the Turkish state, and after that, the Institute of History was renamed the Armenian Science Institute. What does this mean? From this point forward, a new ideology based on the goal of fighting Türkiye began to emerge. What was this based on? First of all, NATO's southern front had to be blocked. The so-called Armenian issue was specifically invoked in this formulation. It emerged as a product of the Cold War period, developed by the Soviet Union in the 1960s in response to NATO's geopolitical pressures. The Armenian issue is primarily a product of the Cold War era and the struggle of geopolitical blocs. Therefore, the so-called Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire is a matter of interstate conflict, and it does not have the slightest connection with history and historical facts, and I can sincerely say that there are two histories here. One from the Ottoman Empire period and written in Russian and Armenian and the other in English. I would like to provide an example to make a comparison. How is the Lebanese uprising portrayed in Russian and related works, such as Russian publications? This uprising is said to have killed 40,000 Armenians. According to British publications, 12,000 Armenians died in the Armenian uprising along with people from other nations. In the mid-nineteenth century, Britain assisted the Assyrian population. They wanted to get the Assyrians on their side. Assyrians also fought against the Ottoman Empire together with the Armenians. Armenians supported the Russians, and Assyrians supported the British. So, it is the same incident that is mentioned. Supposedly the same losses. Exaggerated losses are mentioned in Soviet Russian history. In Britain's history, two enemies, two enemies of the Ottomans, are mentioned. In Russian

works, only Armenians are mentioned. In this sense, the hypocrisy is evident. Yes, we see the ideological part of it. We have seen the ideological dimension of the so-called Armenian genocide issue. Of course, we can state categorically that the context of this issue was originally determined as a tool, a tool of ideological repression, and it was used as an ideological tool of war for the consolidation of the Armenian diaspora and the fight against the Republic of Türkiye. The Warsaw Pact dissolved. A state, a republic of Armenians emerged in the former Soviet lands. The idea of establishing an Armenian ethnic state in Türkiye's lands lost its actuality at this point. Armenia is in the grip of a major economic and political crisis. This is something that we are all aware of. Indeed, Armenians were unable to establish an ethnic state, a mono-ethnic state capable of functioning normally. What Armenia has is ideological cohesion. So, a mono-ethnic state exists here. Ethnic minorities account for less than 2% of the population in that country. There are Yazidis and a few Jews. There are no Muslims left in Armenia. They claim that Armenia has six Muslims. According to them, one of them is the mufti. In brief, they prove their efforts to transform the country into a mono-ethnic state. As such, this is a manifestation of the ideology. It is the result of the idea developed in the 1960s, and these claims arose as part of the ideological project. As a result, a mono-ethnic state was established. This was supported. It was initially assumed that Armenia would be established in this Turkish geography. But then came the events of 1918, and Armenia became what it is today. Dashnak Armenians arose as a result of the Batum Treaty. What happened after that is the reincarnation of events. The Russian Empire collapsed, and then the Soviet Union collapsed. I would like to say only one thing about the context of this issue: Russia has always lost because it supported the Armenians. For instance, Dashnaks played a role in the collapse of Russia. They fought against the Ottomans, but the Dashnaks provoked the Karabakh war in 91, thereby undermining the unity of the Soviet Union. They accelerated the union's collapse. In this context, Russia and Türkiye share common adversaries, necessitating extensive cooperation. The scientific community of Türkiye and Russia should be in great cooperation. We need to examine this problem from multiple perspectives and bring the facts to our people.

Yusuf Sarımay: Thank you very much, Sir.