

AVİM
CENTER FOR EURASIAN STUDIES
Report • No: 14 • May 2017

The Pontus Narrative and Hate Speech

Teoman Ertuğrul TULUN



Ankara • 2017

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ISBN: 978-605-82518-1-6

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DESIGN

Ruhi Alagöz

PRINTING

Neyir Matbaacılık
Matbaacılar Sitesi 35. Cad. No: 62 İvedik-Yenimahalle / ANKARA
Tel: 0 312 395 53 00 - **Fax:** 0 312 395 84 20

PRINTING DATE

May 2017

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Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun completed his undergraduate studies at McGill University and graduated from the Department of Political Science in 2003. Between 2003-2004, he worked as a senior research assistant at the European Union Communication Group (ABIG) in Ankara. He worked as a research assistant at Bilkent University International Relations Department between 2004-2006. He received his master's degree from Bilkent University International Relations Department in 2009. Between 2010 and 2015, he worked as a research assistant and teaching assistant at the same department. Between 2012-2015, he taught courses at the same department. Since 2010, he has been continuing his doctoral studies at Bilkent University Department of Political Science and Public Administration.

Since 2016, Tulun has been working as an Analyst at the Center for Eurasian Studies.

FOREWORD

Since its establishment in 2009, the Center for Eurasian Studies has focused on the Armenian issue as a major impediment to stability, solidarity and cooperation in the South Caucasus and has made comprehensive studies concerning the Armenian claims and allegations. While working on this question, it was unavoidable, to notice similar claims and allegations put forth in the name of “Pontic Greek”.

Certain groups inspired by and taking advantage of the acknowledgement of the Armenian narrative, particularly in the Christian world, initiated their own one-sided and distorted narratives against Turks and the Republic of Turkey. For the sake of bringing a fair, objective, and academic perspective to the issue, we decided to launch a study on the Pontus Question. This paper constitutes the second written work by AVİM on this issue.

We hope this will help to induce further analyses and comments on the issue in the upcoming period based on historical facts.

Alev KILIÇ
AVİM Director

PREFACE

This report examines the Pontian Greek narrative in relation to the First World War developments and the baseless character of the claims and assertions of a “Pontus Genocide” perpetrated by Turks, which was invented and started being talked about in Greece and among the Greek diaspora during the late 1980s. Since these claims are not only directed against the Ottoman Empire, but also to the provisional Turkish government based in Ankara (known as Government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly) that established the Republic of Turkey, special attention has been given to the evaluations of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk concerning “the Pontus Question”. In this context, related parts of his historical speech delivered in 1927 known as Nutuk (En. The Speech) have been reflected in the report with relevant quoted passages. The assessments of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk contained in Nutuk give a very clear perspective of the Turkish evaluation of the “Pontus Question” during the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and sheds light on the true nature of this question. His following words, “this question has done us a great deal of harm,” especially explains the importance attached to this issue by the young Republic of Turkey.

This report also dwells on the hate speech developed over the years against Turks and the Republic of Turkey based on the fabricated “Pontus Genocide”. The hate speech issue, as a global phenomenon, needs further study in the future.

I would like to wholeheartedly thank for the thoughtful guidance and support given to me by AVİM Director Alev Kılıç, AVİM Honorary President Ömer Engin Lütem, and AVİM Consultant Yiğit Alpogan for writing this report. I would also like to extend my thanks to my dear colleagues for their friendly cooperation.

Teoman Ertuğrul TULUN
AVİM Analyst

Introduction

Mentioned in a number of academic texts mainly prepared by Greek origin academics, during the late 1980's and early 90's, a new genocide story called the "Genocide of the Greeks of Asia Minor and the Pontus" was invented and started being circulated in Greece and among the Greek diaspora.¹ Per these claims and accusations, Greeks of Asia Minor and specifically the Pontic Greeks were among the indigenous Christians of the then Ottoman Empire who lost their lives through "massacres, deportations, compulsory labor, or flight under extreme weather conditions under the nationalistic aspirations of the Turkish Government of the time to rid Turkey of its Christian population."² It is claimed in this framework that these acts allegedly were commenced under the Ottoman Empire and were completed by the Young Turks. The longer expression referring to "Asia Minor and the Pontus" by the time boiled down to the "Pontic Genocide". After some years of lobbying and public rallies, its advocates had a bill voted at the Greek Parliament to the effect of recognizing the narrative as "genocide" and determining an official commemoration date for it.³

I. History

1.1 Pontian Greeks and the Origins of Kingdom of Pontus

According to the brochure prepared by the "The Pontian Greek Society of Chicago", Pontus (Greek Pontos), an ancient Greek word for sea, refers to Black Sea and the surrounding coastal areas.⁴ The presence of Greeks in the area, according to the same sources, dates back to ancient times; and during the 8th Century B.C., Greeks from Miletus colonized this area and established cities. Following the death of Alexander the Great, the Greek city-states of Pontus and the Pontian hinterland formed the Kingdom of Pontus. The kingdom lived until its defeat by the Roman Empire in 63 B.C. and eventually became part of the Byzantine Empire.

In reality, the Kingdom of Pontus was founded by the Persian Mithridates dynasty and it was not a Greek kingdom as claimed by the Pontian Greek sources. The indigenous people of the region were said to have come to the

1 Akis Gavriilidis, "Parkhâr Studies: Or, Towards an Anarchic History of South-Western Asia," *International Journal of Science Culture and Sport (IntJSCS)* 3, no. 4 (2015): 140–55.

2 Valerie Liddle, "Exile and Migration Of Pontic Greeks: The Experience of Loss as the Presence of Absence" (University of Adelaide, 2013), <https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2440/88838/8/02whole.pdf>.

3 Gavriilidis, "Parkhâr Studies," 141.

4 Pontian Greek Society of Chicago "Xeniteas,," A Brief History of the Pontian Greek Genocide (1914-1923), Online, n.d., <http://www.stbasiltroy.org/pontos/pontoshistory.pdf>.

region from the Caucasus and from the inner parts of Anatolia. It is believed that certain part of the population was of Georgian origin.⁵ It should also be mentioned that there also exist claims concerning the Turanid roots of the part of the population. Another important fact concerning the population structure of the region is the arrival of Turkmen (Turcoman) tribes into the region since the 10th century leading to the presence of considerable Turkish population in the region even before the conquest of the region by the Ottoman Empire. For this reason, it is not possible to have a clear idea about the ethnic roots of the people of the Pontus.⁶ Thus, considering the very complicated social fabric of the region, it seems not possible to express that all the Orthodox Christians of the region are of Greek origin.

1.2 Fragmentation of the Byzantine Empire and its Successors

The fragmentation of the Byzantine Empire as a result of the Latin conquest of the then Constantinople (İstanbul) in 1204 by the Crusaders, led to emergence of the successor states of the Byzantine. Byzantine population tolerated Latin (Catholic western European crusaders) dominion with extreme reluctance, not only account of the arrogance of their conquerors, but also because of the rift between the two churches, the victors (Catholic Church) and the vanquished (Greek Orthodox).⁷

The ecclesiastical subordination of the Greeks to the Papacy was formally achieved, though not by way of an agreed church union as the Pope had hoped, but by the compulsion resulting from conquest. After the conquest, any real understanding between Greeks and Latin was more remote than ever. Foreign dominion only served to emphasize the Byzantine awareness of their cultural and religious way of life. Though many Byzantine feudal lords had found a place within the ruling system of their conquerors, and though the people, inwardly unreconciled, remained in their old homesteads, not a few of the Byzantine nobles left the territories in the possession of the Latins and fled to the unoccupied regions. They, with the support of the local people, developed new way of lives and successor states.⁸

In this context, the successor states of Empire of Trebizond (Trabzon), Empire of Nicea (İznik) and Principality of Epirus founded by the aristocracy of Byzantine Empire that fled, after the Western European and Venetian forces

5 Stefanos Yerasimos, "Pontus Meselesi," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 43–44 (Güz - Kış 1989 1988): 33–76.

6 Yusuf Sarımay, "Pontus Meselesi ve Yunanistan'ın Politikası," in *Pontus Meselesi ve Yunanistan'ın Politikası: Makaleler*, by Abdullah Saydam, Hamit Pehlivanlı, and Yusuf Sarımay (Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1999), 145.

7 G. Ostrogorski, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 34.

8 J. Freely, *The Grand Turk: Sultan Mehmet II - Conqueror of Constantinople, Master of an Empire and Lord of Two Seas* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 57-71.

occupied the then Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade. The former of these states, Empire of Trebizond, was established under the Byzantine dynasty of Comnenus Family. It came into being during the 13th century consisting of the far northeastern corner of Anatolia and the southern Crimea. The Emperors of Trebizond insisted on their claim on the imperial throne of Byzantine for decades even after the Niceans restored the Byzantine Empire in Constantinople in 1261. The Principality of Epirus was slowly decimated and briefly occupied by the restored Byzantine Empire in 1340, thereafter becoming a Serbian dependency and later inherited by Italians. At the end, it was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1479. Empire of Nicea was also conquered by the Ottoman Empire and it ended in 1453 with the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks. The Trebizond monarchy was the longest surviving successor state of the Byzantine Empire.

1.3 Conquest of the Greek Empire of Trebizond by the Ottoman Empire

Following the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, there was a general consternation in western Europe and the reports that Mehmet the Conqueror (Fatih Sultan Mehmet) was assembling a huge army and fleet to attack Sicily and Italy. Cardinal Bessarion's (a Roman Catholic Cardinal Bishop and the titular Latin Patriarch of Constantinople who was born in Trebizond) letter to the Doge of Venice after the fall of Constantinople catches this concern:

A city which was so flourishing... the splendor and glory of the East... the refuge of all good things, has been captured, despoiled, ravaged and completely sacked by the inhuman barbarians... by the fiercest of wild beasts ... Much danger threatens Italy, not to mention other lands, if the violent assaults of the most ferocious barbarians are not checked.

Frederick III, the Holy Roman Emperor, broke down in tears when he heard the news and shut himself away in his quarter to prey and mediate. His advisers convinced him that he should take direct action and lead a holy war and wage a crusade against the Turks. The Pope issued a bull for a crusade.⁹ However, they failed altogether to stop the Turkish advances in Europe in ensuing years.

The Ottoman Turks had been advancing to the East as well as the West (towards Europe). Before his final conquest of the Peloponnesus, Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror send his Grand Vizier Mahmut Pasha on an expedition against the Black Sea port town of Amasra which was Genoa's principal commercial colony in the northern coast of Anatolia. The Genoese surrendered without a

9 Ibid.

resistance in the autumn of 1459, after which two-thirds of the populace were carried off to İstanbul.

Then, in the spring of 1461, Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror launched an expedition against the Byzantine Empire of Trebizond, sending a fleet of 300 vessels along the Black Sea coast of Anatolia under the command of Kasım Pasha, while he himself and Mahmut Pasha led an army overland, a force estimated as 80,000 infantry and 60,000 cavalry in addition to the artillery and supply convoy. The fleet and army converged at the port town of Sinop.

Meanwhile, Emperor of Trebizond David Comnenus had established an alliance with Uzun Hasan, chieftain of the Akkoyunlu State, a powerful Turkmen (Turcoman) tribe that controlled much of eastern Anatolia. Uzun Hasan's mother, Sara Hatun, was born a Syrian Christian and his paternal grandmother was a Byzantine princess from Trebizond, as was his wife Thedora, daughter of John IV Comneus.¹⁰ The Ottoman Turkish army and the fleet sieged the city. Emperor of Trebizond did not get any support from Uzun Hasan. Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror sent a message to David Comneus by the Grand Vizier Mahmut Pasha's cousin, Chamberlain of David Comneus, Yeoryios Amoirutsis (Yorgi Amiruki) and offered the terms of their surrender.¹¹ David Comneus agreed to the terms of surrender and the Turks took possession of Trebizond on 15 August 1461, exactly 200 years to the day after Micheal VII Palaeologus had recaptured Constantinople from the Latins.¹² David Comneus was allowed to move with his family and all his possessions to Edirne where he was given an estate in Thrace. David lived comfortably there for nearly two years, after which was executed for reasons unrelated to conquest of the Greek Empire of Trebizond.

With the conquest of Trebizond, the whole Black Sea coast of Anatolia became part of Ottoman Empire and the last remnant of Byzantium in Anatolia was thus put an end to by the Turks.

1.4 Pontian Greek Narratives in Relation to the Ottoman Rule and the Developments During First World War

Pontian Greek sources claim that during the first two hundred years of Ottoman rule, the Pontian Greeks successfully resisted the extraordinary pressures to convert to Islam. However, according to the said sources, "thousands migrated

10 Freely, *The Grand Turk: Sultan Mehmet II - Conqueror of Constantinople, Master of an Empire and Lord of Two Seas*, 57-71.

11 İsmail Hami Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, vol. 2, 6 vols. (İstanbul: Doğu Kütüphanesi, 1947), 55-71.

12 Freely, *The Grand Turk: Sultan Mehmet II - Conqueror of Constantinople, Master of an Empire and Lord of Two Seas*, 57-71

into areas of the Caucasus and northern shores of Black Sea controlled by Russia.¹³

One of the major pillars of the Pontian Greek narrative is on how, during the first two hundred years of Ottoman Rule, the Pontian Greeks successfully resisted “the extraordinary pressures to convert to Islam”. Pontian Greek sources claim that “during the 17th and 18th centuries, approximately 250,000 Pontian Greeks were forced to convert to Islam... and thousands migrated into areas of the Caucasus and northern shores of Black Sea controlled by Russia. However, this movement into Russian territory which began in 1774 was in fact encouraged by Russia which preferred that this area be populated with fellow Christians.

Pontic Greek sources also allege that after the reforms and the consolidation of mild political atmosphere for the Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century, in 1908, the Young Turks gained control of the government by revolting against the Sultan Abdülhamit. Then came the Ottoman Empire’s defeat in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) took control of the government. This new era is described by the Pontian Greek sources, i.e. in a propaganda brochure, as one during which the CUP aimed “...to achieve the Turkification of the Empire by eliminating ethnic Christian minorities such as Armenians, Assyrians, and Pontian Greeks.”

At this point, it would be useful to refer to a recently published book in Turkish by Mr. Ari Çokona with the title “20. Yüzyıl Başlarında Anadolu ve Trakya’daki Rum Yerleşimleri” (En. “Greek Settlements in Anatolia and Thrace at the Beginning of the 20th Century”). The author, while explaining the Greek settlements in the Black Sea region refers to “Of Kazası” (Of District), states that in the year 1665, large number of Greeks willingly converted to Islam under the guidance of the bishops of the region. In time, some of them preferred to register themselves as Christian again, while a certain number of them moved to Russia.¹⁴ It is not a secret that in the Ottoman Empire certain Christian populations, not forcefully but with their own will, converted to Islam. It is claimed that part of this populace converted to Islam in order to avoid taxes imposed on the non-Muslims. In this sense, it would be incorrect to claim that “approximately 250,000 Pontian Greeks were forced to convert to Islam” by the Ottoman rulers. Religious conversion in the Ottoman Empire can be seen as more of a socio-economic phenomenon than a political one. Therefore, one of the Pontian narrative’s main pillars that the Pontian Greek population was subjected to a forced conversion to Islam is unconvincing.

13 Pontian Greek Society of Chicago “Xeniteas,,” *A Brief History of the Pontian Greek Genocide (1914-1923)*, Online, n.d., <http://www.stbasiltroy.org/pontos/pontoshistory.pdf>.

14 Ari Çokona, *20.Yüzyıl Başlarında Anadolu ve Trakya’daki Rum Yerleşimleri* (İstanbul: Literatür Yayıncılık, 2016), 197-198.

In 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered WW I on the side of the Central Powers and a general call of conscription, including non-Muslim millets, was issued for the first time in the history of the Empire. During the war, a number of soldiers from the Pontus region defected. They organized in the mountains as insurrectionary bands. It is claimed that the Ottoman authorities took reprisals against these defectors. Russian troops in 1916 took control of Trabzon province and for two years, political power passed into the hands of a provisional government in which Chrisanthos Philippdis, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Trebizond, played a key role. In this period, Russians provided arms to the Pontic bands. However, after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, the Russian troops started withdrawing from the city and the Ottoman irregular forces attacked the city. A large proportion of the Orthodox population escaped to Russia. In February 1918, the Russian troops evacuated the city which was then recaptured by the Ottoman Turks. After a brief truce, Greek-Pontic population organized in insurrectionary bands as regular and irregular Turkish forces fought back. As a consequence, by 1921, a large segment of the rebellious and armed segment of the Pontic Greek community was subdued.¹⁵

1.5 Greek-Pontic Separatist Aspirations and Claims During and After the Paris Peace Conference of 1919

After the defeat in World War I, the Ottoman Empire signed the armistice ending the war on 30 October 1918 at Mudros (on the island of Lemnos). With signing the said document, it was hoped that the state could continue its existence with the indulgence of the Allied Powers. The Allied had partitioned the Ottoman Empire through their secret agreements concluded during the war. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the socialist government in Moscow revealed the contents of secret inter-Allied agreements on the Middle-East. To carry out the partition plans, it was necessary to convince international public opinion before the signing of the peace treaty that the Ottoman Empire could no longer maintain its existence. To realize their ambitions and lend themselves legitimacy, it was necessary to demonstrate that the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire could not cohabit peacefully and that the Allied had to assume the role of bringing harmony among these clashing groups.¹⁶

In 1919, the Allied consulted among themselves to prepare for the peace negotiations while the non-Turkish elements of the Ottoman state strove to influence the Allied Powers in order to meet their aspirations. In this regard, the defeat of the Ottoman state in the WW I and the signing of the Mudros Armistice

15 Manolis Pratsinakis, "Contesting National Belonging: An Established-Outsider Figuration on the Margins of Thessaloniki, Greece" (PhD, University of Amsterdam, 2013), 244.

16 Melek Firat, "Relations With Greece," in *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1919-2006 : Facts and Analyses with Documents*, trans. Mustafa Aksin, Accessed from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn5680539> (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), 243–44.

were greeted with jubilation by the Greeks living in the Ottoman lands as well as in Greece. For the first time after so many years, it seemed to the Greeks that their dream of Megali Idea (Great Ideal) was about to come true.

In such a spirit, the Paris Peace Conference was convened in 1919 to settle the issues of the WWI and to set the peace terms for the defeated Central Powers following the armistices. Along with the formal participants of the conference, delegations from the Ottoman minorities also arrived in Paris. Ottoman Armenians and Greeks were at the forefront to dismember the Ottoman Empire and to establish their independent, and if this was not possible, autonomous states or regions.

In this framework, besides the formal Greek delegation under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Venizelos representing Greece, a delegation of the Greeks in the Ottoman Empire under the leadership of Acting Greek Patriarch of İstanbul Droteos attended the conference to submit their requests. The Metropolitan of Trebizond Chrysanthos (In 1913 he became the Metropolitan of Trebizond and then the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece between 1938 and 1941) was part of this delegation.¹⁷ Chrysanthos arrived Paris on 29 April 1919 through Athens and Marseilles. He made number of contacts with the Pontic Greek associations on his way to Paris. Upon his arrival in Paris, he had meetings with Venizelos during which disagreements with Venizelos emerged. Following these meetings, Chrysanthos delivered a memorandum on 2 May 1919 with the title of “Pontus Question” containing his version of Pontus Greek population.¹⁸ In his memorandum, he was using the title of “Metropolitite of Trebizond and the Delegate of Unserved Greeks” (Trabzon Metropoliti ve Kurtarılmamış Rumların Delegatesi).¹⁹

The memorandum begins by defining the “Pontus region” which includes the province of Trabzon (Trebizond), Karahisar, Sinop , Amasya, the Sanchaks of Sivas and Kastamonu provinces and claims the Pontic Greek population in this area as 600,000. It adds 250,000 Pontic Greeks who had previously migrated to the “Russian coasts and Caucuses” and arrives at a fictitious number of 850,000. Interestingly, it provides numbers of Muslim population as “340,000 real Turks, 200,000 Sürmeneli, 50,000 Caucasian, 200,000 Of’lu and 5,000 Stavriyun”.²⁰ In fact, this break down of Muslim population by Chrysanthos indicates how deep in his mind the racial and ethnic discrimination was.

17 Sarıay, “Pontus Meselesi ve Yunanistan’ın Politikası,” 17–18.

18 Yerasimos, “Pontus Meselesi”, 36.

19 The Turkish translation of this memorandum was published by the Directorate General of Press and Information of The Turkish Grand National Assembly Government in Ankara on 1922. This publication is considered as one of the first publications of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Yılmaz KURT, *Pontus Meselesi*, 68 (Ankara: TBMM Kültür, Sanat Ve Yayın Kurulu Yayınları, 1995), 109.

20 Yılmaz KURT, *Pontus Meselesi*, 68 (Ankara: TBMM Kültür, Sanat Ve Yayın Kurulu Yayınları, 1995), 108, <http://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11543/.../199600519.pdf?>

After providing these fictitious numbers and almost equating the numbers of Muslim population and Pontic Greeks according to his own strange calculations, he refers to Russian occupation of Trabzon and his subsequent administration of the city in close collaboration with the invading forces. He claims at the end of the memorandum that the Muslim and Greek population in the region was almost equal, while majority of the Muslim population was originally Greek, who had forgotten neither their identity nor language and who demands to place the “Pontus region” under the control of an autonomous Greek state.²¹

These over-ambitious, quixotic, non-applicable demands had not even been accepted by the Greek Government and Venizelos, while officially presenting Greek territorial requests to the Paris Peace Conference on 30 December 1918 by a memorandum, did not even mention the word “Pontus”. Venizelos only referred to Ottoman provinces of Trabzon, Sivas, Kastamonu, and provided the Greek population figures as follows:

Trabzon: 353,533; Sivas: 99.376; Kastamonu: 24,919 = Total: 477,828.

Venizelos referred to Turkish population in the same provinces as follows:

Trabzon: 957,866; Sivas: 839.514; Kastamonu: 938,435= Total: 2,735,815.

Venizelos in his memorandum made also reference to “Armenian provinces and the Russian Armenia” and proposed the creation of an “independent Armenian State” under the mandate of one of the major member states of the League of Nations which may include the province of Trabzon. As stressed above, he did not mention the creation of “Pontus Republic”.²²

It came to the surface in the Paris Peace Conference that the population figures provided by the Pontic organizations were far removed from reality. According to the document published by the Turkish Grand National Assembly Government on 1922, the population figure in that period for all Christians (without considering the differences in Christian orders and ethnicities) was about 250,000 in the area claimed as “Pontus Republic” by the so-called “Pontic National Assembly”. This area was depicted on a map printed in Paris printing house of Lambesis. The map seized in the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Samsun.²³

21 Mustafa Serdar Palabayık and Yıldız Deveci Bozkuş, “The Pontus Question: An Overview,” *Uluslararası Suçlar ve Tarih/International Crimes and History*, no. 7–8 (2009): 23–93.

22 Paschalis Kitromilides and Alexis Alexandris, “Ethnic Survival, Nationalism, and Forced Migration,” *Bulletin For Asia Minor Studies* V (1985 1984): 9–44.

23 Kurt, *Pontus Meselesi*, 61–62.

1.6 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Evaluation of the "Pontus Question" in *Nutuk*

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, first President of the Republic of Turkey, delivered a speech at Ankara from 15 to 20 October 1927 before the deputies and the representatives of the Republican Party (of which he was the founder and head). This historical speech is in fact a comprehensive account of his leadership and known as "Nutuk". The speech was delivered before Turks by a Turk, by a man who from the commencement of his military career was intimately associated with the political events occurring in his country; before men who, like himself, have lived to witness or share in the two eventful decades of the modern history of their native land. Atatürk, in his speech explained how the new Turkey had been built up, on what foundations she was standing, and what were the paths she must tread in the future. In his speech, he also dealt with, in his words, "the Pontus question" and as the introductory remarks regarding the issue said that "*this question has done us [Turkey] a great deal of harm*".²⁴ The following quoted passages from the speech gives a very clear perspective of the Turkish evaluation of the "Pontus question" during the establishment of the Republic of Turkey:

"Since the year 1840, that is to say, nearly three-quarters of a century ago, there were some Greeks who were engaged in reviving the old forms of Hellenism on the Black Sea, between Rize and the Bosphorus. A Greek monk named Klematios, who had emigrated to the United States and had returned, founded the first institution on a hill that is today called Manastır (Convent) at İnebolu, which served as a meeting place of the adherents of the Pontus persuasion. The members of this institution appeared from time to time in the form of separate bands of brigands. During the World War, the Greek villages in the neighborhood of Samsun, Çarşamba, Bafra, and Erbaa had nearly all been turned into arsenals containing rifles, ammunition, bombs and machine-guns, which had been sent from foreign countries and distributed among them.

After the Armistice had been concluded, the Greeks, impelled by the Hellenistic ideal, assumed an arrogant and provocative attitude nearly everywhere.

Prepared morally by the propaganda of the "Ethniki Hetairia" and the American institutions at Merzifon and encouraged materially by the foreign countries who supplied them with arms, the mass of the Greeks, on the other hand, begun to cast amorous glances in the direction of an independent Pontic State. Led by this idea, the Greeks organized a

24 Kemal Atatürk, *A Speech Delivered by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, 1927*. (Istanbul: Ministry of Education Print Plant, 1963), 528-530.

general massacre, seized the mountain heights and began to carry on a regular programme under the leadership of Yermanos, the Greek Metropolitan of Amasya, Samsun and the surrounding country.”

Gazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha [Atatürk] in his speech stressed that “The whole of this rebel band was under the protection of some foreign representatives at Samsun who were also busy arming these men.... It was perfectly clear that the foreign officers who had arrived with the deputations of the Red Cross had been ordered to form organizations and undertake the military instructions and training of the members -in short, to lay the foundations of the future Pontic State.

Atatürk in his speech refers openly to the role and involvement of foreign countries in the “Pontus question” and especially draws the attention to the “American institutions in Merzifon”. This institution is called the American College of Merzifon, which was established by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions as a theological seminary after the American college in Bebek-İstanbul abandoned its theological training. Like other similar schools spread across Anatolia, the school served to educate the children of the Greek and Armenian community in Anatolia. The graduates of this school between the years 1880-1919 almost entirely consisted of Greek and Armenian students. The American Board, along with the school, facilitated also a mission hospital in Merzifon.²⁵ Missionary school conducted disintegratory activities especially among the Greek Students and with the help of the American principal and the teachers of the school first Pontus Club was formed in this school. The said club and the American teachers were involved in the illegal activities, including the murdering one of the Turkish teachers (Zeki Bey) of the school. The school was closed by the Turkish authorities on 23 March 1921 and 29 American staff of the school were deported. All these developments communicated by a diplomatic letter of Ahmet Muhtar, the Foreign Minister of the Turkish Grand National Assembly Government, to Admiral Bristol, the American representative in İstanbul.²⁶

1.7 Pontic Greek Activities and Efforts to Create a Pontic Greek State in Anatolia on the Eve of the Creation of the Republic of Turkey

In a leading article on the 4th March 1919, the newspaper “Pontus” which made its appearance in İstanbul, announced that the aim of their endeavors was the erection of a Greek Republic in the Vilayet of Trabzon. On the 7th April 1919, the anniversary of Greek Independence, meetings were organized in a number

25 İdris Yücel, “A Missionary Society at the Crossroads: American Missionaries on the Eve of the Turkish Republic,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 14, no. 40 (Spring 2015): 47–71.

26 Kurt, *Pontus Meselesi*, 369–79.

of cities and especially at Samsun. The Greeks living in the district of Bafra and Samsun held meetings in their churches, augmented their organizations and supplemented their equipment. On the 23rd October 1919, İstanbul was proclaimed to be the center of the movement for “Eastern Thrace and the Pontus”.²⁷ In his speech, Gazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha stated that “Alexandros Simbrakakis who was commissioned with the organization of the secret Greek police in İstanbul, had sent a Greek corps officers to Samsun on board the Greek torpedo boat Eiffel with instructions to organize the gendarmerie at Pontus.” In the meantime, a Greek Government under the the “Greek Pontic Government” was formed on the 18th December 1919, at Batum. A congress of the Greeks of the Black Sea, the Caucasus and Southern Russia took place on the 19th 1919 at Batum, to discuss the Pontic Question. The memorandum drafted at that congress was sent by members of it to the Patriarch in Istanbul. Towards the end of the year 1919, the Pontus organizations redoubled their activities and began to work quiet openly.²⁸

The Pontic organization which had been formed in the mountains was composed of the bands of armed men under the command of several leaders, administrative and police organizations and transport columns. The bands were operating in different zones. The bands had six or seven thousand men. Augmented by more adherents, this number subsequently rose to about twenty-five thousand. Divided into small parties, these bands entrenched themselves in different localities. The work of this mob of brigands was burning down Muslim Turkish villages and committing indescribable cruelties against the Turkish population. For taking precautionary steps against these cruel actions, the 3rd Army Corps stationed at Sivas devoted itself exclusively to the eradication of these bands.

The Eftalidi band and that of “Köroğlu”, who were ranging about in the district of Trabzon, as well as some others, were followed and suppressed by the 15th Army Corps, which was in garrison at Erzurum. The population also rose and national forces were formed in the districts which were infested with these bands. In the meantime, to amalgamate the troops which were destined to restore quiet and order, on the 9th December 1920 the 3rd Army Corps at Sivas dispended and its duties was transferred to the newly-formed Central Army under the command of Nurettin Pasha.²⁹

The Central Army, with the total strength of nearly 10.000 men, effectively combatted against the Pontus bands. However, it was not possible to eliminate this threat only with military means. For this reason, the Government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, in parallel to military means, decided to

27 Atatürk, *A Speech Delivered by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, 1927*, 528–30.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

take certain administrative and judicial measures. In this framework, by way of an official declaration made by the Assembly, young Greeks were called to military service as conscripts and those in the Pontus bands were called to surrender with their arms. Around the same period, as previously mentioned, number of documents concerning the Pontus illegal organizations with arms and ammunition were confiscated in the American College of Merzifon. In addition to these developments, in May 1921 there was a possibility of landing of Greek forces on the coast of Samsun. Taking into consideration all these developments, the Ministry of Interior of the Government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly forwarded to the Assembly a draft recommendation proposing the adoption of a decision for moving those Greeks who are capable to take arms to the interior regions of the country. However, the Assembly during its session of 5th June 1921 did not give its consent to these recommendations. Following the increased activity of the Greek naval units in the Black Sea and the increased possibility of Greek landings on the Black Sea coast, the Ministry of Interior asked from the Assembly to revise its decision of 5th June 1921. Meanwhile, the Greek navy bombarded İnebolu on 9th June 1921. Around the same period, Battle of Sakarya in the western front of the Turkish War of Independence (very important engagement in the Greek-Turkish War of 1919-1922) was approaching and urgent need came into being for sending all the Turkish forces to the western front. There was a possibility to fight against the invading Greek forces in two fronts. In such circumstance and taking into account the increased activity of the Greek navy in the Black Sea and the bombardment of İnebolu, the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 12 June 1921 decided the transference of those Greeks living in the coastal areas between the ages of 15 to 50 who were capable to take arms to the interior regions of the country. This decision of the Assembly was communicated to the Central Army Command on 16 June 1921. The Central Army Command instructed the relevant authorities on 19 June 1921 to transfer this population to Ergani, Malatya, Maraş, Gürün and Darende. The instruction contained the details of necessary measures concerning the security of these people. On 2 July 1921, the Ministry of Interior asked from the Assembly to expand the population transfer to the whole Black Sea region. The Assembly approved this proposal. Furthermore, the Grand National Assembly on 3 July 1921 declared the entire Black Sea coastal area as war zone.³⁰

1.8 Efforts to Invent a Genocide Story from the Military Campaign to invade Anatolia and Establish a Pontus Republic in Anatolia

As elaborated in various paragraphs above, during the first two decades of the 20th century, efforts had been undertaken with the aim of creating a Greek state

30 Sarıay, "Pontus Meselesi ve Yunanistan'ın Politikası," 134–38.

at the Pontus. The project for such a state was promoted mainly by the local elites and some diasporic elements.³¹ For example, Trabzon based Greek National Unity Society (Rum İttihad-ı Milli Cemiyeti) had branches also in Europe. The center of Greek propaganda in Europe was France, particularly Marseilles where an organization called the External Pontic Congress (Harici Pontuslular Kongresi) was established and directed by Konstantin Konstantinide, the son of the mayor of Giresun, Yorgi Pasha. With the aim to raise the Pontic cause and attract the attention of the international community, the group organized conferences and sent letters. In one of the meetings of the said Congress, Konstantinides delivered a speech in which he, in line with his unrealistic goals, defined the region of Pontus stretching from the Kastamonu province in the west and the Caucasus in the East. He also pronounced the number of Orthodox Greeks living in this region as 1.5 million. Konstantinides sent letters to Leon Trotsky, the then Russian Commissar for Foreign Affairs and asked the Russian intervention for the establishment of a republic in the area he defined as Pontus.³² The dream of Pontic state did not get massive support even in Greece. According to Greek sources, the Greek leader Eleftherios Venizelos, when asked to back the plan, clearly refused to do so, as he saw no realistic possibility of creating and sustaining such a state.³³

Pontic Greeks, as it was also mentioned previously, during World War One deserted their home and fled to Russia because of their own ambitions for separate state and their armed struggle against the state they lived in. Afterwards, some of them were sent to Greece as part of the population exchange of the Lausanne documents. During the tumultuous days of the first quarter of the 20th century, hundreds of thousands of people from all ethnicities and religious beliefs in Anatolia perished. Pontic associations and researchers of Pontic origin claim that the number of those perished in the period 1912-1922 as up to 353,000 people.

These numbers were challenged even in the academic articles defending the Pontus claims and were considered, to say the least, as “miscalculation based on an overestimated original population”. It is quite interesting to note that the “Pontic Genocide” claim is also contested in modern Greece, by the supporters of the “Greek Genocide”. According to their thesis, defining the Pontian experience as an exclusive, isolated, and distinct event reduces the “genocide” to only “northern Asia Minor”, ultimately shrinking the actual number of “Greek Genocide victims throughout the whole of the Ottoman Empire.”³⁴ In credible Greek academic sources, it is mentioned that in its isolation and self-

31 Gavriilidis, “Parkhâr Studies,” 145.

32 Palabayık and Bozkuş, “The Pontus Question: An Overview” 59; Yerasimos, “Pontus Meselesi”, 39.

33 Gavriilidis, “Parkhâr Studies,” 145.

34 Pratsinakis, “Contesting National Belonging: An Established-Outsider Figuration on the Margins of Thessaloniki, Greece,” 145.

containment, Pontic society constituted a whole world on its own. The Pontic population was primarily living in the highlands of the region and the rural areas where the structure and cultural traditions of a closed, tightly knit society sealed it off from the outside world. In the 19th century, due to trade with adjacent areas, an urban stratum in Pontic society came into being and this group provided the leadership of Pontic society, which spearheaded the local nationalist movement and the failed attempt to create the republic of the Pontus in 1919-1922.³⁵ This description of the Pontic behavior at the beginning of the 20th century and how their “egocentric” approaches perceived in the Hellenic world is quite remarkable.

It is also mentioned in the same sources that the Pontic Greek behavior to the population exchange of Lausanne Convention was also different. According to these sources, in many villages of the Pontic highlands, armed groups of Pontic fighters attempted to resist the population exchange and when it became clear that their resistance was in vain, they guided their communities into the neighboring areas of Caucasus.

Figures given in the above-mentioned source on the Greek population in Anatolia is also worth to mention. Per these figures which that claimed to be collected by the Greek Government through the Greek missions in Anatolia with the help of Greek Patriarchate on “Ottoman Greek nationals throughout Turkey”, the Greek population was nearly 1.5 million. The number of those who were claimed to live in the Ottoman Vilayets (Provinces) of Trabzon and Sivas (comprising ecclesiastical dioceses of Amasya, Niksar, Şebinkarahisar, Trabzon, Gümüşhane, Maçka) was around 400,000. It is reported in this source that the number of Greek refugee population which flooded into Greece after 1922 was not established until the general population census of 1928. According to this census, the total refugee population of Greece was around 1.1 million. Out of this number, it is reported that 182,000 persons came from “Pontus region”. Per their calculation, it is estimated that about 80,000 Pontic Greeks, instead of going to Greece, preferred to move to the Caucasus and southern Russia following the old pattern of migration from the so-called Pontus region to those regions. The same source is also reporting that between 1922 and 1928, it has been estimated that about 75,000 persons died because of natural mortality. Even based on these exaggerated figures, certain Greek academics reject the Pontic associations’ claim that more than 350,000 Pontic Greeks perished during the last decade of the Ottoman Empire which mainly corresponds firstly to the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, then to World War One and the disastrous campaign of the Western powers to invade Anatolia by using at the forefront Greece.

35 Kitromilides and Alexandris, “Ethnic Survival, Nationalism, and Forced Migration” 17–18.

1.9 Pontian Demands for Affirmation of Their Independent Pontic Identity based on the Invented “Genocide” Story

The Pontic Greeks are generally considered as the people of the mountains and frontiers. They lived in the marginal locations and distinctive regions of the multi-ethnic empires like the Byzantine, Ottoman, and Russian. Following the exchange of populations in accordance with the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, the Greek State strongly encouraged them to settle in the mountainous border areas of northern Greece, in Macedonia, and Thrace. After World War Two, during the 1950s and especially the 1960s, the population of Macedonian villages was the subject of massive migration to the major Greek cities of Athens and Thessaloniki, and to Western Europe (Germany, Belgium, Sweden), Australia, Canada, and the USA mainly for economic reasons. Among these countries, Australia and Sweden are considered particularly representative of the Pontic diaspora of Western Europe and the North America. Pontic Greeks are attached to their places of origin and distinctive identity. By the time their “lost home territory” concept transformed into a “territory of memory” and they started to concentrate on demanding international recognition and acknowledgement of the invented “genocide” stories which they believe is committed against their people. Thus, they have strongly engaged in cultural and remembrance activities to perpetuate the affirmation of their identity.³⁶

According to a PhD thesis submitted to the Amsterdam University in 2013, the Greek nation state was shaped by two counterbalancing trends of forced or voluntary outflows of non-Greek populations on the hand and, inflows of or inclusion through territorial expansion populations which felt attached to and desired to be recognized as belonging to the community of Greek descent on the other. As a result of this process, the Greek nation state came to be perceived as an ethnically homogeneous entity. Although the multicultural reality of the Ottoman Empire at a certain degree was eradicated from public space and memory, the population that comprises the modern Greek polity is still characterized by a substantial internal cultural diversity. This is reflected in the survival of several distinct Greek ethnocultural identities.³⁷

In this framework, especially the Pontic Greeks retained a sense of separate identity and preserved a number of cultural traits as characteristic of their group which separate them from other Greeks. This identity also has diasporic dimension. For them, being a Pontic Greek is to claim origins in their lost homeland. The perseverance of the Pontic identity is an attempt to remain faithful to their ancestral land, to assert allegiance to the past and to keep

36 Michel Bruneau, “The Pontic Greeks, from Pontus to the Caucasus, Greece and the Diaspora,” *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de Géographie Alpine* 101, no. 2 (décembre 2013): 1–5.

37 Manolis Pratsinakis, “Contesting National Belonging: An Established-Outsider Figuration on the Margins of Thessaloniki, Greece,” 244.

mentally their homeland alive. Pontic Greek culture is different enough to underpin a separate identity within the bounds of overarching Greek identity and at the same time not too different to be rejected as non-Greek. In fact, the derogatory term used in slang “Turkish seed” challenges their Greekness. As early as the 1930s, ethnic associations were established, stage plays were written and performed in the Pontic dialect. In the 1950s, the Virgin Mary Soumela Church in Vermio (northern Greece) was established. The 1960s and 1970s saw a proliferation of cultural clubs which aimed to disseminate Pontic customs. During the 1980s, second and third-generation Pontic intellectuals attempted to politicize the Pontic identity while a Center for Pontic Studies was established along with the inauguration of the International Pontic Congress. The scope of action of the Pontic community was extended into the global arena. One key outcome of the political mobilization was the introduction of the issue of the “Pontic genocide by the Turks”.³⁸

II. The Present

2.1 Greek Government’s Policy Concerning the Topic of Genocide and the Pontic Greek Activities in Turkey

Pressures from Pontian lobbies was instrumental in having the Greek Government pass a motion on 24 February 1994 that May 19 be a day of commemoration for the “Pontian Genocide”. The issue was introduced into the Greek political agenda in 1992 by the then main opposition leader Andreas Papandreou. He proposed May 19 as the commemoration day for the so-called “Pontus Greeks Genocide”. When he became the Prime Minister, he brought his proposal to the Parliament and Greek Parliament adopted a law declaring May 19 as a day of remembrance of the “Genocide of the Pontian Greeks.”³⁹

After the adoption of this law in Greece, Pontic associations further extended the scope of their lobbying activity, promoting their diasporic project of getting the “Pontic Genocide” recognized. According to the author (Manolis Pratsinakis) of the above-mentioned PhD thesis submitted to the Amsterdam University,

They also became concerned with Pontic-speaking Muslims in Turkey and their cultural rights. Exhibiting a paternalistic mentality, Pontic associations portrayed them as dormant Greeks of forced Muslims, and acted as self-proclaimed protectors for such groups. Attempts were made to engage Greek government action in that direction.⁴⁰

38 Pratsinakis, “Contesting National Belonging: An Established-Outsider Figuration on the Margins of Thessaloniki, Greece,” 196–98.

39 “Pontus AB’ye gidiyor,” *Milliyet*, May 17, 2006, sec. Dünya.

40 Pratsinakis, “Contesting National Belonging: An Established-Outsider Figuration on the Margins of Thessaloniki, Greece,” 199.

In fact, a number of articles were published in various news outlets on this subject in Turkey, a conference was organized in Ankara and a certain book was published.⁴¹

2.2 Pontic Greek Genocide Fabrication and Hate Speech Against Turks

In the light of foregoing, it can be expressed objectively and academically that the “Pontus genocide by Turks” claim is a fabrication and this allegation might be referred simply as a blatant lie. The credible Greek academic studies also consider this claim as an “invention”. This claim does not even deserve to be discussed in terms of the international legal definition of genocide. The same is true in a certain degree in relation to the moral and ethical side of the issue. It is a fact that thousands of people from all ethnicities and religions perished in before, during, and after WWI in Anatolia. It is a fact that certain parts of the Pontic Greeks tried to dismember the state they lived in, collaborated with the invading forces of Anatolia, fought against the people they lived together for centuries, very aggressively disrupted the inter-communal relations, and at the end, they lost.

Out of these fabricated stories and unsubstantiated allegations, a language of hate-speech was developed over the years against not only Turks but also against the Republic of Turkey.

It is well-known that no universally accepted definition of the term hate speech exists. Though most states have adopted legislation banning expressions amounting to “hate speech”, definitions differ slightly when determining what is banned. In the absence of an agreed definition of the term, only the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers adopted a Recommendation 97(20) on “hate speech”.⁴² It defines “hate speech” in the “Scope” section of the Recommendation as follows:

For the purposes of the application of these principles, the term “hate speech” shall be understood as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.

41 Yorgo Demir, “Belgeler ve tanıklıklarla 1914-1923 Pontus Rum Tehciri,” *AGOS*, January 6, 2014, sec. Yazı; Rupen Varjabedian, “Resmi tarihin unutturulan sayfası: Pontos Rum Soykırımı,” *AGOS*, October 12, 2016, sec. Yazı.

42 “Recommendation No. R (97) 20 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on ‘hate Speech’” (Council of Europe, October 30, 1997), <https://go.coe.int/URzjs>

The reference to the elements of the term “hate speech” is also found in the European Court of Human Rights’ judgements. The Court, in this context, refers in some of its judgments to “all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance”.⁴³

Invented stories of “Pontus Genocide by Turks” in fact involve the main elements of the Council of Europe’s definition of hate speech.

With the advent and globalization of the information society, hate speech has also become globalized. This fact necessitates a sense of responsibility and application of a finite judgement. The ideas and acts that are offensive, aggressive, degrading or provocative against certain groups enforce misperceptions and increase grievances. Hate speech, if not checked, has a potential to trigger the old wounds, and reopening the old wounds might be more harmful than the first ones. We should keep in mind that hate caused a lot of problems in Anatolia, but has not solved a single one of them.

43 European Court of Human Rights. Press Unit, “European Court of Human Rights. Press Unit. Factsheet” (European Court of Human Rights., March 2017), http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Hate_speech_ENG.pdf.

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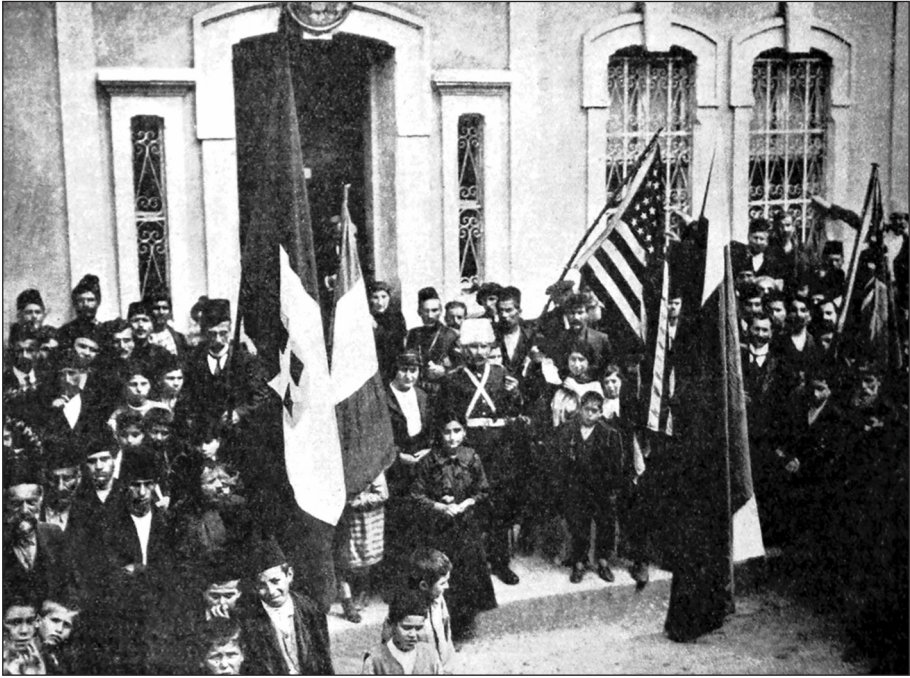
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A photo showing some local Greek Pontians of Trabzon greeting the invading Russian army in front of the Ottoman Governor's house (Source: <http://wowturkey.com>).

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