

# Reshid, Mehmed

By [Hans-Lukas Kieser](#)

Reshid Şahingiray, *Mehmed*

(Reşid Şahingiray, Reşid Bey)

Ottoman governor of Diyarbekir, physician, Committee of Union and Progress official

Born 08 February 1873 in Caucasus, Russian Empire

Died 06 February 1919 in Istanbul, Turkey

## Summary

A founder of the Committee of Union and Progress, Dr Reshid excelled during World War I as a proactive governor of Diyarbekir. He was responsible for exterminating most Christians, including Assyrians. Although a typical top official under Interior Minister Mehmed Talat, he did not, in contrast to others, succeed at transitioning to the Kemalist single-party regime.

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## Background

Born in the Russian-administered Caucasus on 8 February 1873, Mehmed Reshid Şahingiray (1873-1919) always carried a family name, in contrast to Muslim-born Ottomans. His family fled from Russian domination in 1874, emigrating to the [Ottoman Empire](#) and settling in Istanbul, where the young Mehmed was brought up and educated. During his studies at the Military School of Medicine, he joined classmates to found a conspiratorial club, which finally took on the name of [Committee of Union and Progress \(CUP\)](#). In 1894, he became assistant to the German professor [Ernst von Düring \(1858-1944\)](#) at the hospital of Haydarpaşa, but was arrested and exiled to Libya in 1897 due to his CUP membership. He was a doctor in state service for ten years in Tripoli, where he married the daughter of a military officer who was also an exile.

## A Zealous Executioner

After the Young Turk Revolution, Dr Reshid served first in the army, before transferring to civil administration. He became district governor of Istantk y (province of Archipelago), then of Hums (province of Tripoli, Lebanon), Kozan (province of Adana), and Lazistan (province of Trebizond). The temporary anti-CUP [government](#) removed him from office in September 1912. He became a governor again only together with the establishment of a CUP single-party regime in summer 1913, and was henceforth a zealous executioner of his superior [Mehmed Talat Pasha \(1874-1921\)](#), the powerful minister of the interior and dominant party leader.

Immediately after the [Balkan Wars](#), Talat appointed Dr Reshid as the district governor of Karesi in the Aegean province of Balıkesir. At Karesi, he was one of the protagonists of the violent expulsion of Greek-Orthodox Ottomans (*R m*) from the Aegean coast in spring 1914. His patriotic fervour was now expressed through large-scale anti-Christian actions. His *Notes from Balıkesir*, written before action,<sup>1</sup> contain a blend of social envy, [nationalistic](#) aversion, and ethnoreligious class struggle together with the will to demographically Islamise the whole region. He was angry to see that Ottoman Ayvalık was “a Greek [Yunan] city. The city is extremely prosperous, very ordered, the houses are very pretty. But the inhabitants are generally *R m*.” He was satisfied that “in Edremit a national and a commercial sentiment has awakened, and a rivalry against the Christians has arisen.” He proposed to bring Muslim migrants, Muslim policemen and Muslim administrators to the region. Finally, a year later, he prided himself on having removed the *R m* without facing major protest.<sup>2</sup>

After the successful *R m* removal, Talat promoted Dr Reshid to the rank of a *vali* (province governor) and offered him, on 19 July 1914, the charge of “secretary general of the inspectorate of the provinces of Van, Bitlis, Diyarbekir and Mamuret laziz”, while commending his devotion, capabilities and efficiency.<sup>3</sup> The international reform agreement for Eastern Asia Minor, signed on 8 February 1914, foresaw two powerful inspectors from [neutral](#) countries to control a process of reform, designed to implement the egalitarian participation of all religious groups in regional politics, and establish a functioning rule of law. “Fortunately, the First World War started,” as a young colleague in Talat’s administration put it in retrospect, “and prevented the implementation of that harmful [reform] project.”<sup>4</sup>

On 13 August 1914, Dr Reshid was named *vali* of Diyarbekir, but served first for short times as a *vali* of Basra, a vice *vali* of Baghdad, and a *vali* of Mossul. In Diyarbekir, finally, he proactively attacked and exterminated the Ottoman Christians in his province right from late March 1915, when he arrived, and also targeted the Yezidis. He implemented, first, a general

purge of Armenian employees in the local administration. On 16 April, his forces surrounded the Armenian quarter, searched the houses, [raped](#) and plundered, and arrested several hundred men—thus anticipating Talat’s general measures of 24 April 1915. A strike force of about thirty mainly Circassians that had already served him in Karesi formed the core of his security forces and was joined by the local gendarmerie and a militia under Mustafa Cemilpaşazâde, a prominent member of the local CUP. Talat wired Reshid 500 Ottoman pounds for this troop, which became the main instrument to [kill most Armenians](#) and a majority of other Christians in the province of Diyarbekir in spring and summer 1915.<sup>5</sup> In line with his [Social-Darwinist](#) anti-Christian mind-set and the general religious polarization in the East, he largely included the Assyrians in the repression and argued against a “door of conversion” through which victims could be saved.<sup>6</sup> He claimed to have “removed” 120,000 Armenians from his province.<sup>7</sup>

## Final Years

Dr Reshid served for a year in Diyarbekir. From 26 March 1916 to 27 March 1917, he was *vali* of Ankara, but was ousted due to involvement in (or protest against) widespread corruption related to the army procurement service.<sup>8</sup> He returned to Istanbul with his family, and started to import perfumes. Arrested on 5 November 1918, shortly after the [Mudros armistice](#), he escaped, aided by friends, but the police of the Istanbul government, which prosecuted war criminals, managed to retrace him. On 6 February 1919, he shot himself in the head. Later, the Turkish parliament (*Türk Büyük Millet Meclisi*) in Ankara assigned his family a pension for his “services to the fatherland”.<sup>9</sup>

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## Notes

1. Balıkesir Notları [Notes of Balıkesir], in: Bilgi, Nejdet (ed.) / Reshid, Mehmed: Mehmed Reshid, [Şahingiray]. Hayatı ve Hâtıraları [Mehmed Reshid, his life and his memoirs], Izmir 1997, pp. 65-76. ↑
2. Reshid, Hayatı ve Hâtıraları 1997, p. 22. ↑
3. Talat’s letter of 19 July 1914 is partially quoted in Reshid, Hayatı ve Hâtıraları 1997, p. 22. ↑
4. Tankut, Hasan Reşit: Doğu ve Güneydoğu Bölgesi Üzerine Etno-Politik Bir İnceleme [An Ethno-Political Inquiry into the Eastern and Southeastern Region], in: Bayrak, Mehmet: Açık-Gizli, Resmi-Gayriresmi Kürdoloji Belgeleri [Open or Secret, Official or Non-Official

- Documents of Kurdology], Ankara 1994, p. 219. ↑
5. Kaiser, Hilmar: *The Extermination of Armenians in the Diarbekir Region*, Istanbul 2014, pp. 149-169. ↑
  6. Reshid to Talaat, 25 June 1915, BOA, Ottoman State Archive, Istanbul, DH. ŞFR. 477-14. ↑
  7. Reshid to Ministry of the Interior, telegram of 18 September 1915, in: *Armenians in Ottoman Documents (1915-1920)*, Ankara 1995, p. 105. ↑
  8. Talat Pasha's telegram of 22 March 1917, quoted in: Reshid, *Hayatı ve Hâtıraları* 1997, pp. 30-31. ↑
  9. Bleda, Mithat Şükrü: *İmparatorluğun Çöküşü [The Collapse of the Empire]*, Istanbul 1979, p. 61. ↑

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- [Üngör, Uğur Ümit: \*\*The making of modern Turkey. Nation and state in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950\*\*, Oxford; New York, 2011: Oxford University Press.](#)

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## External Links

- [Dağlıoğlu, Emre Can \(in Turkish\): Diyarbekir celladı Doktor Reşid, 10 April 2015 \(AGOS\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Üngör, Ugur: Diyarbekir \(1915-1916\). Young Turk Mass Killings at the Provincial Level, 25 March 2009, in: Violence de masse et Résistance - Réseau de recherché \(Sciences Po\) \(Article\)](#)

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