

# Minorities (Ottoman Empire/Middle East)

By [Hans-Lukas Kieser](#)

The Ottoman Empire was the most religiously diverse empire in Europe and Asia. Macedonia, the southernmost Balkan regions and Asia Minor, which formed historically and in the minds of late Ottoman elites the territorial core of the empire, housed large groups of Christians and a significant number of Jews. Religious diversity characterized the core regions of the Islamic empire. Struck by an existential crisis beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman state undertook reforms, declared the equality of its subjects, willingly maintained its diversity and even institutionalised the cultural and religious autonomies which it had given its Christian and Jewish communities. When the Ottoman state failed to defend its territory and sovereignty, the Young Turk Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the revolutionary rulers who gained power in a coup, finally decided on a program of national homogenization in Asia Minor which it carried out in 1914-1918. The CUP classified the Ottoman populations and dealt with them through resettlement, dispersion, expulsion and destruction – depending on the populations' assimilability into a Turko-Muslim nation in the Anatolian core. It judged the Muslims, in particular the Kurds, assimilable, but the Christian groups non-assimilable.

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## Introduction

The [Ottoman Empire](#), a dynastic, patrilineal Muslim state which adopted Sunni Hanefi Islam in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, ruled over an ethnically and religiously diverse population in the Balkans, Asia Minor, Iraq, Syria, the Arab peninsula and [Northern Africa](#). Its large communities of Christians and small groups of Jews enjoyed the status of autonomous *millet* (communities or “nations”). In Koranic tradition they were protégés who had to pay additional poll taxes. Ottoman agreements with European powers since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called Capitulations, privileged members of the *millet* insofar as in late Ottoman times a significant number of them enrolled as European nationals and thus enjoyed liberation from Ottoman taxes and jurisdiction.

The *millet* communities were called “minorities” in Western terminology, as well as in the [Lausanne Treaty](#) of 1923 which laid down the post-Ottoman order in the Middle East. However, since there was no clear majority even in the imperial core region in ethno-religious terms, the term “population group” is more accurate; the Ottomans themselves used the word *unsur* (“element”). Non-Sunni groups without *millet* status were tolerated but marginalized in the late Ottoman era. These included the Alevi of Anatolia, the Yezidis of Northern Iraq and the Shiites of Southern Iraq, the Alawites of Syria and particular Alevi groups in the mountains of Dersim (eastern Anatolia) which was partly autonomous until 1937. Although nominally Muslim, the Sinti and Roma (Gypsies) in the Balkans and western Anatolia were also marginalized. Though heterodox, the Druzes were, by contrast, able to defend some regional autonomy in Lebanon. Beside the *millet* communities and the century-old heterodox groups, a new element, the [Zionist Yishuv](#) (Jewish settlement) emerged in Palestine beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in addition to the older *Yishuv*.

This article frames the 1914-1918 period as both destructive for the plurality of the Ottoman population and constitutive with regard to a Turko-Muslim nation-state as well as for a Jewish nation-state in Palestine. It is based on research conducted since the 1990s by several scholars and scholarly networks of late Ottoman history and the history of violence. Recent research deals in depth for the first time with the formative years of the last Ottoman decade and the Ottoman position in the First World War.<sup>[1]</sup> Before focusing on its main topic, the article sheds light on the late Ottoman Empire, the situation of its population groups and relevant political developments. It concentrates on the main theatres of war in Asia Minor, the Caucasus and Syria (including Palestine and the Lebanon).

## 1914-1918: “National” Homogeneity instead of Ottoman Equality cum Plurality

## Late Ottoman Background

Reform in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century called for equality for all Ottoman subjects. It endorsed and for the first time codified *millet* autonomy, which was a-territorial and concerned civil matters. The Reform Edict of 1856 obliged the *millet* to constitute themselves as quasi-democratic entities with a constitution (*nizâmnâme*) and an elected assembly. This concerned the *Rûm millet* (of Greek-Orthodox creed) including Greek-, Arab- and Turkish-speakers, the Armenian *millet*, the Protestant *millet* composed mostly of Armenians, the Catholic *millet*, as well as the Jewish *millet*. The Nestorian Syriacs (*Asuri*) – tribes living in the southern part of the eastern provinces whose patriarch did not reside in the capital – as well as other Syriac Christians (*Süryani*) were not full partners in these reforms. The coexistence of legal equality and ethno-religious plurality, conferring autonomy on the non-Muslim *millet*, remained largely a utopian ideal. Many Sunnis, who were members of the ruling imperial class, feared becoming the reforms' losers. They included Muslim [refugees](#) (*muhacir*) from the Caucasus and the Balkans as well as Kurds in the eastern provinces from whom the centralizing state of the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had taken away centuries-old regional autonomies. Some Alevi tribes near Dersim, on the other hand, tried to become members of the Protestant *millet*, thus escaping their social marginality and, like the Christian *millet*, connecting with missionary and diplomatic representatives of [Great Britain](#) and the [USA](#).<sup>[2]</sup> Shiites in Iraq as well as the less numerous Yezidis in Northern Mesopotamia and the Nusayri-Alawites in Syria felt excluded both from the Sunni-based Ottoman system and from the reform dynamics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Conflicts in the Balkans and the consequent Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1888 led to dramatic territorial losses for the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the entirety of Cyprus, all sealed at the Berlin Congress in 1878. As a consequence, [Abdülhamid II, Sultan of the Turks \(1842-1918\)](#) considered the political principles of the preceding reform period a failure, suspended the Ottoman constitution of 1876 and implemented policies designed to empower the (Sunni) Muslims and to assimilate the Alevis, Yezidis and Shiites. The [empire](#) increasingly considered Asia Minor its core land given the territorial losses of previous decades.

Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty also stipulated reforms for Armenians. When these failed to materialize, educated young Armenians founded revolutionary parties. The program of the Armenian party then most committed to revolutionary action, the Hntchaks, advocated an independent socialist [Armenia](#) for all inhabitants in the predominantly Kurdo-Armenian eastern provinces. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) or Dashnak Party, which prevailed after the 1890s, pushed for an Armenian future within a reformed Ottoman state. Both championed rural armed self-defence and activism informed by socialist and [nationalist](#) revolutionary ideas and directed against Ottoman authorities and Armenian notables. The 1895 massacres of approximately 100,000 mostly male Armenians in the eastern region of Asia Minor took place against this background as a reaction to a reform plan finally initiated by European diplomacy. Kurds and other local Muslims seized Armenian land and property, leading to the notorious Kurdo-Armenian agrarian question and the crucial Armenian postulate that land be restored. The resolution of this issue on a legal basis in favor of the

weaker part and not by the rule of local Muslim, mostly Kurdish force, became in Armenian eyes a litmus test for collaboration with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) after 1908.<sup>[3]</sup>

In 1889, Muslim students in Istanbul had founded a secret revolutionary network in opposition to Abdulhamid, soon to be called the CUP. Members of this network staged a revolution in 1908 to restore the constitution of 1876. Ottoman citizens rallied to the [revolution](#) and re-elected a parliament. Reform-oriented groups and populations as diverse as the Young Turks (including the CUP and liberals), the Armenians, the Zionist *Yishuv* and American missionaries all hoped a constitutional Ottoman Empire would frame the future of the Middle East. The Armenians were largely seen as the element most loyal to the constitution and to the CUP as long as it behaved constitutionally.<sup>[4]</sup> However, as external and internal tensions increased, 1908 was followed by boycott movements and press campaigns against Ottoman Christians. Among young and educated Turkish speaking Muslims and in the cohort of Young Turk activists in the early 1910s, a new ideology of radical, though not yet violent, Turkism loomed large. Acquainted with defeat and loss since the Italian usurpation of Ottoman Libya in 1911 and the subsequent [Balkan wars](#), Young Turk activists saw the outbreak of the First World War as an opportunity to forge a “new deal” both internally and externally.

The CUP established dictatorial power as the result of a putsch in January 1913 and marginalized any possible political opposition, in particular the liberal group of [Mehmed Sabahaddin \(1879-1948\)](#), also known as Prince Sabahaddin, who advocated a decentralized empire. The Ottoman reform programme of 1908 had depended on cooperation between the ARF and the CUP and, in particular, the establishment of security and a solution to the agrarian question in the eastern provinces.<sup>[5]</sup> As this did not transpire, the ARF announced the end of its alliance with the CUP in August 1912. At the end of the same year, Armenian representatives contacted foreign diplomats to press for reforms.<sup>[6]</sup> Like Abdulhamid's government two decades before, the CUP government finally signed a reform plan on 8 February 1914 under foreign pressure. The reform plan divided the eastern provinces into northern and southern parts; put them under the control of two European inspectors to be selected from [neutral](#) countries; prescribed publication of laws and official pronouncements in local languages; provided for an adequate proportion of Muslims and Christians in councils and police; and transformed the *Hamidiye*, an irregular Kurdish cavalry, into cavalry reserves.

Like Abdulhamid's government, the CUP resented these reforms. It viewed Asia Minor as the Muslim and Turkish core of the Ottoman Empire, even more so as Macedonia had been lost during the Balkan Wars. Anatolia was therefore the last refuge for Turkish-speaking Muslim *muhacir* from the Balkans and the Caucasus.

## Demographic Engineering during Total War

CUP members had signalled to Armenian representatives that by broaching the issue of reform internationally, they had crossed a red line with regard to building a common future within the Ottoman state. In addition, as a consequence of the Balkan War, the CUP now considered the *Rûm*

to be a disloyal element close to nominally Christian enemies who drew even closer after [Greece](#) conquered the islands of Chios and Mytilene during the Balkan Wars. The CUP began to conceive of *Rûm* villages and towns at the Aegean coast as places where hundreds of thousands of *muhacir* from the Balkans could be settled. Overall, the CUP's demographic policy considered Turkish-speaking Muslims to be the most reliable core element of a future Turkey and believed that other Muslim groups, if sufficiently dispersed among Turks, could be assimilated.

## Expulsion of the Rûm

In spring 1914, after steps toward population exchanges with its Greek and Bulgarian neighbours in the Balkans, the CUP began to implement an agenda of anti-Christian demographic engineering on the Ottoman western coast. The [paramilitaries](#) of its newly founded Special Organization expelled some 200,000 *Rûm* from the Aegean littoral. When the Ottoman Parliament discussed the expulsions on 6 July, [Mehmed Talat Pasha \(1874-1921\)](#), Minister of Interior and leading member of the CUP's Central Committee, emphasized the need to settle Muslim refugees from the Balkans in those emptied villages.<sup>[7]</sup> At this decisive moment when the Ottoman future was at stake, the Parliament still met and it still represented ethno-religious diversity, the *Rûm* deputies were left alone to face an increasingly authoritarian government and other deputies who questioned or belittled the expulsion and forceful expropriation, unwilling to listen to the *Rûm* CUP deputy Emanuel Emanuelidis' solemn plea for rule of law. A year later, in spring and summer 1915, the parliament was closed and public opinion completely censored.<sup>[8]</sup>

The [international crisis of July 1914](#) saved the regime from a possible war with Greece and diplomatic backlash against the expulsion. Allied with the Ottoman Empire since 2 August 1914 and eager to win over neutral Greece, [Germany](#) insisted that its Ottoman ally henceforth avoid acts of violence against the *Rûm*. Still, approximately 300,000 *Rûm* were removed from different coastal regions to the interior during the course of the First World War beginning in February 1915. However, while some of the deportees suffered violent attacks, they were neither systematically massacred nor sent into the desert.<sup>[9]</sup> Under the shield of its alliance with Germany and in the shadow of the war, the Young Turk regime began to implement its domestic agenda. On 6 August 1914, [Hans Freiherr von Wangenheim \(1859-1915\)](#), the German ambassador to Istanbul, accepted six new Ottoman proposals, among them “a small correction of her [Turkey's] eastern border which shall place Turkey into direct contact with the Moslems of [Russia](#).”<sup>[10]</sup> The main Armenian settlement area was located between the Turkish-speaking Muslims in Asia Minor and the Caucasus, both in the Ottoman and the Russian Empires.

## Propaganda, Mobilization and first Campaigns

Strong pan-Turkist and pan-Islamist propaganda began to appear in the Ottoman press in early August 1914 which alienated and intimidated non-Muslims.<sup>[11]</sup> At the same time the regime started to

make plans for joint hostilities with Russia. The CUP invited the ARF to lead an anti-Russian guerrilla war in the Caucasus, aimed at preparing a future Ottoman conquest. However the ARF balked at these plans, which would have set the Caucasian Armenians at risk of retaliation, and stated that all Armenians should remain loyal to the country in which they lived. Ottoman attempts at insurrection and sabotage in the Russian Caucasus without the ARF began in August 1914.<sup>[12]</sup>

Although the degree and impact of pan-Turkism are still discussed, it is beyond debate that the CUP's main ideologist [Ziya Gökalp \(1876-1924\)](#), a member of the CUP's central committee, was an explicit pan-Turkist. Together with other authors he promoted the conquest of the Caucasus and the "liberation" of Russia's "Turks" (Muslims). In addition, many CUP members and army officers were "excited pan-Turkists" as for example [Rahmi Apak \(1887-1963\)](#), a Kemalist politician, confessed. He himself had joined as a young officer the elite division created in autumn 1914 for pan-Turkist conquest.<sup>[13]</sup>

Although the Ottoman Empire officially entered the First World War only in November, the Ottoman army had already begun to mobilize and requisition to an unprecedented degree in August; requisitions hit non-Muslims in the eastern provinces particularly hard.<sup>[14]</sup> Ottoman troops, together with Kurdish tribal forces, attacked Persian Urmia, 110 kilometers east of Hakkâri in the province of Van, while Christians on the Ottoman and the Iranian sides of the frontier looked to Russia for protection. Beginning in August 1914, Russia built up a local Iranian Christian militia based on Christian Armeno-Syriac solidarity.<sup>[15]</sup>

During the first days of 1915, the Ottoman campaign against the Russian Caucasus failed catastrophically in the snowy mountains of [Sarıkamış](#) near Kars. At least half of the 120,000 soldiers perished. [Disease epidemics](#) began to spread among the survivors and throughout the whole region. Smaller campaigns with irregular forces led by [Ismail Enver Pasha's \(1881-1922\)](#) brother-in-law Tahir Jevdet and uncle, General [Halil Kut Pasha \(1881-1957\)](#) in Northern Persia harmed Armenian and Syriac villages, but again failed in their military objectives. The Ottoman forces were decisively defeated in the battle of Dilman in mid-April in which General [Andranik Ozanian's \(1865-1927\)](#) Armenian volunteer brigade in the Russian army participated.<sup>[16]</sup> As a consequence of these defeats at [Sarıkamış](#) and Dilman, the pan-Turkist dream, which had spurred the mobilization in August 1914, turned to trauma in winter and spring 1915.

The long [eastern front](#) was brutalized and religiously polarized. Irregulars and regulars, militias and forces of self-defence were engaged in low-intensity [warfare](#) that took a heavy toll on civilians. Many Armenians fled to Russian Armenia, among them several thousand young Armenians who became volunteers in the Russian army. Christians, where possible, tried to rely on Russian help. The best known Russian effort was the relief of the Armenians in Van in mid-May 1915. Beginning on 20 April, after massacres in Armenian villages and the murder of Armenian individuals from Van, Armenian activists resisted Jevdet's repression. Once relieved by Russia, they mistreated and killed Muslim civilians, thereby contributing to the flight of large numbers of inhabitants from Van.<sup>[17]</sup> The failed

Ottoman campaigns and the chaotic situation at the eastern front infuriated CUP leaders and made the local Armenian and Syriac Christians an easy target for the propaganda of  *Jihad*.<sup>[18]</sup>

### **Anti-Armenian and anti-Syriac Policies**

Committee policies radicalized in the context of the general brutalization of war in spring 1915 and began to then converge on a comprehensive anti-Armenian policy. Minister of the Interior Talat coordinated the developing policy in three main phases: first the arrest of Armenian political, religious and intellectual leaders in April and May 1915; second, from late spring to autumn, the removal of the Armenian population of Anatolia and European Turkey to camps in the Syrian desert east of Aleppo, excluding Armenian men in eastern Anatolia who were systematically massacred on the spot; third and finally, the starvation to death of most of those in the camps and the final massacre of those who still survived.<sup>[19]</sup>

In two seminal ciphered telegrams of 24 April to the provincial governors and the army, with reference to Van and a few other places, Talat defined the situation in Asia Minor as that of a general Armenian rebellion; of Armenians helping the enemy's war efforts; and of revolutionary committees that had long since wished to establish Armenian self-determination and now believed they could achieve it as a result of the war.<sup>[20]</sup> Provincial and military authorities, and in particular special CUP commissaries sent to the provinces, henceforth spread propaganda throughout Anatolia of treacherous Armenian neighbours who stabbed Muslims in the back.<sup>[21]</sup> On the night of 24 to 25 April, security forces began to arrest Armenian elites throughout Anatolia, starting in Istanbul, and to question, torture and murder most of them. Various Ottoman army sources of spring 1915 from the provinces certainly *do not* support the claim of a general uprising, although there were instances of sabotage and some resistance to oppression as well as many desertions of both Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>[22]</sup> On the same day, 24 April, a telegram from Talat to [Ahmed Cemal Pasha \(1872-1922\)](#), military governor of Syria, announced that henceforth Armenians should be deported not to Konya, as had been the limited number of Armenians expelled from Cilician Zeytun in March, but to northern Syria.<sup>[23]</sup>

A provisional law of 27 May – the parliament had been closed on 13 March – allowed repression and mass deportation if national security were at issue. The law served as legal cover for a comprehensive policy of removal. Although it did not limit Armenian removal to clearly defined zones and although the Entente publicly warned the Ottoman authorities of future punishment for crimes against humanity on 24 May, German officials still did not anticipate or counter the risk of an Empire-wide extermination of Armenians. On the contrary, their approval was a decisive breakthrough for a regime which a few months previously had found itself strictly bound to implement, jointly backed by Germany, a monitored coexistence of Christians and Muslims, Armenians, Syriacs, Kurds and Turks in eastern Asia Minor.<sup>[24]</sup>

The removal of the Armenians from eastern Asia Minor mainly took place from May to September

and from western Anatolia and the province of Edirne in Thrace from July to October 1915. In eastern Anatolia, men and boys were mostly massacred on the spot; those in the army were separated into unarmed labour battalions and also killed. At the Dardanelles and in Arabia, Armenian soldiers continued to fight in the Ottoman army. In the west, men were also forcibly removed and some of the deportees left by train. Women and children from central and eastern Asia Minor endured starvation, mass [rape](#) and enslavement on their marches. In certain places, in particular the province of Diyarbakir under Governor Dr. [Mehmed Reşid \(1873-1919\)](#), removal amounted to the massacre of men, women and children. Reşid treated *all* Christians in a similarly murderous manner.

As early as 26 October 1914, Talat had ordered the governor of Van to remove the Christian Syriac population in Hakkâri near the Persian border. He considered this population unreliable and wanted to disperse it among a Muslim majority in the western provinces. He could not, however, implement this early policy of removal and dispersal in autumn 1914<sup>[25]</sup> and did not transform it into a general policy of removal cum extermination as in the case of the Armenians. In June 1915 the regime nevertheless applied a policy of destruction against the Syriac enclave in Hakkâri and also against villages near Midyat which reacted against Reşid's anti-Christian extermination. In the case of the region of Hakkâri, two thirds of about 100,000 Syriacs perished, while the others managed to escape to Russian-held territory.<sup>[26]</sup> Most Christians, Armenians and Syriacs, were massacred in or removed from the eastern provinces beginning in the spring of 1915.

Several hundred thousand destitute Armenian deportees arrived in Syria in the summer and fall of 1915. Most of them were not resettled, as had been promised, but isolated in camps and starved to death according to rules that their local or regional demographic proportion must not exceed a few percents.<sup>[27]</sup> Those who nevertheless survived were massacred in 1916. Only recently have scholars published witness accounts of the extreme horror of this second phase of the [genocide](#) and studies on limited efforts to help the victims.<sup>[28]</sup> The major group of survivors in Syria were 100,000-150,000 Armenians whom the CUP triumvir Jemal Pasha settled in southern Syria, converting them to Islam.<sup>[29]</sup>

The destruction of the Ottoman Armenian community was symbolically completed in August 1916, when the Armenian *nizâmnâme* of 1863 was entirely revised, the Armenian Assembly abolished, a new Ottoman Armenian Patriarchate established in Jerusalem, and Patriarch [Zaven Der Yeghiayan \(1868-1947\)](#) exiled from Istanbul to Baghdad. With the genocide and these changes, the 1856 Tanzimat reform principle of equality cum plurality, including a-territorial democratic *millet* autonomy, had died. Ottomanism was dead; it could no longer serve as a viable modern principle as it had vigorously done after the revolution of 1908. In contrast to the massacres in the 1890s, conversion only warranted survival in 1915-16 if the Ministry of Interior permitted it as an exception. Conversion of religious identity and confession of faith was secondary to the latter's demographic rationale; or, as the governor of Trabzon put it at the beginning of July 1915, "an Armenian converted to Islam will be expelled as a Muslim Armenian."<sup>[30]</sup> This policy was a break with Muslim imperial tradition.



Beside “Jemal's Armenians,” few deportees had been able to escape. Most important was the earlier escape to Erzincan and Erzerum, occupied by the Russian army in 1916. Thousands of Armenians had found refuge among the Alevi in mountainous Dersim in 1915 and were able to cross the Russian lines in 1916. Others had fled beyond the eastern front and returned with the advancing Russian army, which retreated after the [October Revolution in November 1917](#). Unable to stop the return of Young Turkish rule, Armenian militias on the retreat committed massacres against Muslims, including the Alevi population, which did not support them in 1918 in that region.<sup>[31]</sup>

The [Treaty of Brest-Litovsk](#) of 3 March 1918 allowed the re-launch of pan-Turkist schemes and raised the spectre of further Armenian extermination. [Russia](#) lost a huge part of her western empire to [Germany](#), but also, as stipulated in Article 4, the north-eastern corner of Asia Minor that it had acquired in the Berlin Treaty in 1878. The German Foreign Office confirmed in June 1918 the advance of Ottoman troops far beyond the agreement of Brest-Litovsk. More than 1 million people were in danger according to [Matthias Erzberger \(1875-1921\)](#), a leader of the democratic opposition in the *Reichstag*.<sup>[32]</sup> The resolution of the war on the other fronts would ultimately prevent a further Ottoman advance in the Caucasus.

The most reliable of the widely varying figures for the death toll is that a half or more of the nearly 2 million Ottoman Armenians alive in 1914 (the figure of 2 million comes from the statistics of the [Armenian Patriarchate](#)<sup>[33]</sup>) were killed in 1915-1916. An important contribution to the discussion on the extent of the killings was the publication in 2008 of Talat's notebook, complete with demographic figures. Talat considered the Ottoman Armenian population in pre-1915 Asia Minor to be 1.5 million, of which he claimed to have removed more than 1.1 million. A small remnant endured, often Islamised. Others fled before being removed, most of them to the Caucasus.

## **Removal of Muslims and Jews**

From spring 1916 onwards, hundreds of thousands of Kurds were deported from eastern areas near the front and dispersed by settlement in western Anatolia. The deportations were conducted by the same Interior Ministry that had orchestrated the Armenian removal through the Office of Tribal and Immigrant Settlement. The specific goals of the policies were different from those implemented against Armenians: in this case forcible assimilation at the point of relocation. While the death toll was nevertheless high due to logistical issues, the Kurds were neither deported to areas where life was impossible nor attacked en route.<sup>[34]</sup> Like the Kurds, but with no more than a few thousands per group, Albanians, Arabs, Bosniaks, Laz and Muslim Georgians were also resettled and dispersed in Anatolia far from their places of origin. The removal of Arabs targeted a major group of families considered to be separatists. Side by side with others, including refugees from Libya, they were dispersed and resettled in parts of Anatolia from which Christians had been removed.

In contrast to all these Muslim groups, the CUP judged Jews in Palestine as a whole to be unreliable,

non-assimilable to Turkishness and possibly separatist and thus to be removed to other places within the Empire or to be expelled, although more than 20,000 Jews had successfully applied for Ottoman citizenship since the eve of the war. 10,000 Jews were resettled by the end of 1915, while a smaller group of foreign nationals and Zionists were expelled.<sup>[35]</sup> Because Palestine was less central than Anatolia for the CUP and Germany and the USA applied pressure in favour of the Jews, the Yishuv did not, despite many fears, experience the same fate as the Armenians.

In the same vein, the Christians of Greater Syria were never targeted in a way that could be compared to the treatment of Christians of Asia Minor, in particular the Armenians. The Armenians saw their future in Asia Minor – a place that the Turkist movement claimed as *Türk Yurdu* (the Turkish national home) and was not ready to share. The prominent figures of the CUP sponsored the *Türk Yurdu/Türk Ocağı* movement – the organization of the cultural Turkist movement with branches in most provincial towns and in major towns in Europe – and declared to be its members since the eve of the First World War.<sup>[36]</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1914-1918, the dictatorial CUP government pursued chimeric expansive goals in the Caucasus, Egypt and the Balkans, as well as a comprehensive demographic policy that concentrated on Asia Minor and purposed unrestricted state sovereignty and a national home for Muslim Turks. The situation of [total war](#) contributed to radical demographic engineering and an unprecedented destruction of Ottoman Christians. The CUP regime fought a war in 1914-1918 both externally and, even more than any other country in Europe, also internally, because its prioritarian goal was to restore the state's sovereignty. Sovereignty was restricted in particular by the Capitulations as well as the Reform Agreement of February 1914, both in favour of Ottoman non-Muslims. In order to win its “war at home,” the CUP organized a genocide whose main victims were Armenians, i.e. Christians who had been strongly involved in Ottoman politics but did not share the CUP's war aims and could not easily be expelled to another state. In addition, the Ottoman *Rûm* were victims of a first wave of expulsion to Greece in late spring 1914. The large majority, nearly 1.5 million, of Ottoman *Rûm* were expelled from Anatolia towards the end of the war from 1919-1922. In this war for Asia Minor, the Muslims led by Turkish nationalist officers and former CUP members prevailed against the Greek army. A population exchange agreed upon in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty finally accomplished Asia Minor's demographic de-Christianisation.

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## Notes

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