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The Armenian Diplomatic Mission in Constantinople (1918-1923) in the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano

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In 2018 Armenia commemorates the centenary of the First Republic (1918-1920). The archive of the diplomatic representative in Istanbul, which operated in the city on the Bosphorus until the end of the summer of 1923 and now found among the papers of the Pontifical delegate in Turkey, gives opportunity to retrace the parable of the small Caucasian Republic, especially in the deeds of its representatives in Paris; to dwell on the activity of the Holy See in favour of the Armenian State; and to formulate a hypothesis on the reasons why the archive is now preserved in the Vatican records.

A singular folder

The container no.102 of the records of the Apostolic Delegation in Turkey, retained in the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, collects documents concerning Armenian affairs under the Ottoman Empire during the mission of Angelo Maria Dolci in Constantinople (1914-1922). In particular the box contains 5 files with reports, letters, notes, and official and unofficial papers on the persecution against Armenians and about the assistance and relief measures to the survivors set up by the Holy See; but one file (no.533) is quite unusual. It is not made of documents

generated or received by Dolci but by papers completely unrelated to the activity of the apostolic delegation: there are 884 sheets, 492 written in Armenian, 382 in French, 9 in Russian, and 1 in Turkish. The documents cover the period between the beginning of 1918 and the middle of 1923, and they are linked to an institution whose actions develop in an independent way and without any direct connection with the apostolic delegation: the only thing they have in common is Constantinople as the seat of office. A large number of papers are recorded with double numbering: the original number, written in pen on the top left (only for drafts of outgoing mail); a second one, added later, is written in pencil on the bottom left, by Vatican archivists (on all the sheets). The statistics records are not arranged to the exact classified progression of the original numbering.

The file in question states as follows: *Armeni. Corrispondenza della Repubblica Armena, per lo più in lingua madre, richieste di sussidi e casi diversi*. It stores all documents of the delegate of the first Armenian Republic, Ferdinand Tahtadjian, during his stay in Bosphorus; telegrams and letters sent to the authorities of the new Armenia State in Erevan; correspondence with the President of the National Delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris, Avetis Aharonian and with the other Armenian delegations in Batoumi and Berlin. Furthermore, with the representatives of the victorious Powers which by the end of the Great War are occupying Constantinople. "Chargé d'affaires, Ferdinand Tahtadjian acted as an envoy, not to Turkey, but to the Allied High Commissioners and to the military authorities ensconced in the Ottoman capital" (Hovannisian 1971, 55). But the mission of the Armenian representative is, above all, aimed at coordinating and facilitating food delivery and energy supplies, clothing and blankets, and agricultural machinery and tools, through the Near East Relief founded in America to help the Armenian refugees who survived the genocide. There are several freight transportation bills among the documents, and Tahtadjian must often intervene to clear goods left for weeks in custom warehouses at

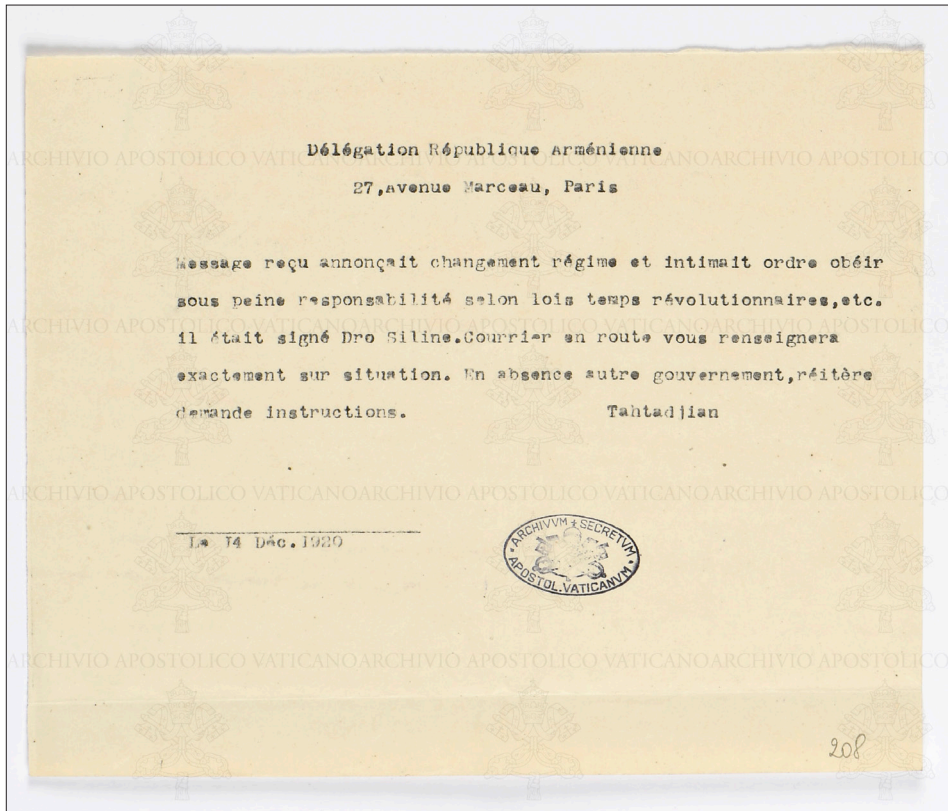
the city port; in particular on one occasion, a shipment of 1 million cartridges for the Armenian government. His duties include planning the distribution of money raised by various Armenian committees around the world, and the issue of passports to those who want to leave the Anatolia and Caucasian territories towards Europe and the Americas continents.

The Armenian *chargé d'affaires*, whose correspondence travels with the heading of diplomatic delegation, also acts as an informer of the events in Turkey and in the Caucasus, and becomes the spokesman of the requests coming from Aharonian: for example, in December 1920, Tahtadjian writes to Paris to inform officials about the end of the Republic of Armenia: “According to my information from an Allied source, a Soviet government is already established in Armenia and General Dro is designated as a military dictator”¹; or when some magazine in Constantinople at the end of November 1922 reports the news that an Armenian committee in Ventimiglia had contrived a plot to take the life of high Turkish officials in order to raise tensions between Christians and Muslims and to induce an unusual reaction: Tahtadjian forwards to the Allied commissioners a denial note from Aharonian asking for an investigation to identify the authors of the treacherous machination. Tahtadjian may also have provided some support for the missions of Operation Nemesis, a secret organization created in Erevan by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Dashnak* party²) with the aim to do justice to those responsible for the massacres of Armenians during the Great War. Some messages in Tahtadjian’s archive are in cipher.

In addition to the office held by Tahtadjian during his mission in the Ottoman capital, which can only be proved by a close examination of

¹ Tahtadjian to Aharonian, telegram, December 10, 1920, 203, file 533, box 102, DAT, AAV. Translations of quotes, when not originally in English, are edited by the author.

² The most important politicians of the First Republic of Armenia belong to the *Dashnak* Party (ARF).



Tahtadjian informs the delegates in Paris of the regime change in Erevan, 1920. Archivio Apostolico Vaticano

the documents, the questions that this essay tries to find an answer to are: Why are the papers of the official envoy in Constantinople of the first Armenian Republic now stored in the Vatican? What were the relations between the authorities of the first Republic of Armenia and the Holy See? What historical circumstances caused the safekeeping of the documentation collected by Ferdinand Tahtadjian during a 5 year period, subsequently inserted amongst the papers of Dolci mission in Turkey?

1918. Ferdinand Tahtadjian in Constantinople

The Brest-Litovsk Treaty drawn up in March 1918 provides the terms and border lines between Russia, which withdrew from the war after the seizure of power by the Bolshevik revolutionaries under Lenin, and the Central nations (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Ottoman Empire). About the eastern Anatolic peninsula, article n.4 states:

The districts of Ardahan, Kars, and Batum will likewise and without delay be cleared of Russian troops. Russia will not interfere in the reorganization of the national and international relations of these districts, but leave it to the population of these districts, to carry out this reorganization in agreement with the neighboring States, especially with Turkey³.

In other words, not only do the Russian army troops have to leave the Turkish territories occupied during the Great War, but also that the Ottoman Sublime Porte can regain those regions lost following the defeat in the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878: the Armenians who for 40 years have lived under the ruling Tsar and had survived the violence and deportations between 1915-1916, suddenly find themselves without a government and run the risk of falling victim to the vengeance of Turkish soldiers who consider them as traitors. After the Soviet enforcement in Russia in October 1917 the Caucasian people (Georgian, Armenian and Azeri) join in a Commissariat, which tries to oppose the Ottoman army that at the beginning of 1918 starts to move eastward. The conference arranged between Turkish delegates and Transcaucasian members in Trebisonda (February) fails because of Brest-Litovsk; Constantinople claims the territories as agreed with Central Powers and Russia, whereas the Commissariat does not recognize Brest-Litovsk and proclaims its independence from Moscow:

³ The Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk art. 4, March 3, 1918, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/brest.asp#art4. The districts of Kars and Ardahan return to Turkish control with the Treaty of Alexandropol signed by the crumbling Republic of Armenia on December 3, 1920. The Soviets reject the Treaty, then confirm the borders established in Alexandropol with the Treaty of Kars on October 1921.

the new Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR) is established. Fighting against the Ottoman troops, which continue to advance, are the Armenian forces led by Commander Dro and Aram Manoukian. Following a strenuous resistance, the city of Kars falls under the attack of Vehib Pacha (April 25). The Armenians who live in these regions, terrorized, are forced to flee towards Erevan and Tiflis, but many of them decide to remain in the districts now fallen in Turkish hands and their fate is somewhat shaky. With the conquest of Batumi too, the Sublime Porte has completed the re-annexation plan according to the clauses of Brest-Litovsk, but Ismail Enver Pacha, Ottoman minister of war, is not satisfied. Despite the ongoing peace conference in Batumi (May 11) with the representatives of the TDFR and of German Empire, Enver launches an offensive to Erevan: after the success in the battle of Karakilisa (May 28), the Ottoman corps are defeated by the Armenian forces at Sardarapat (May 29). Meanwhile, due to an internal contrast, the TDFR split up: Georgia declares its independence on May 26, Azerbaidjan on the 27, and Armenia on the 28. The new Caucasian State, with Erevan as capital and called Ararat Republic also, doesn't include the Ottoman provinces. The clashes between Turkish and Armenian military units come to an end following a new truce drawn up at Batumi (June 4). A conference is decided at Constantinople at the end of the month to define peace agreements. Avetis Aharonian is nominated chairman of the Armenian Republic Delegation. He travels to the Ottoman capital on June 15 along with Alexandre Khatissian and Mikael Babadjanian.

In this context, for the first time, in a document drawn from Vatican archives we find the name of Ferdinand Tahtadjian, in a letter written from Tiflis dated June 21, addressed to Serge der Abraamian, apostolic administrator of Armenian Catholics in the Russian Empire. The letter is undersigned by Dionigi Kalatosoff and Antonio Kapoian, vicars of der Abraamian who is in Rome for a few months: they complain of having no contact with their superior, and describe the miserable plight

of the dioceses occupied by Turks (Artvin, Ardanuci, Kars, Batum, Alexandropol, Axalkalak, Axalzik, Zori), where loyal people suffer violence and evacuations. Kalatosoff and Kapoian write also of a petition send to Vehib Pacha, who agreed to meet a delegation where one of the member is

Mr Tactagian. For now the Georgian government has allowed to cross the border, in a few days it will also get permission from the Ottoman government and then the delegation can depart. Now I hear that Mr. Ferdinand Tactagian leaves for Constantinople, as member of the Armenian delegation for peace negotiations; we gave him an official letter, undersigned by us two members of the administration and by three notables of Khodorciur region, authorizing him to voice our regards before His Beatitude the Patriarch Mons. Terzian, begging Him to give some news about the Khodorciur families exiled in the Turkish inland districts⁴.

Tahtadjian is therefore a man close to the Armenian Catholic Church, with a good reputation in political circles⁵ and appointed to join the delegation in Constantinople of the new State. On July 5 Angelo Dolci, apostolic delegate, draws up a report for the Secretary of State Pietro Cardinal Gasparri on the Armenian representatives:

Members of the Armenian delegation came to leave the visit cards to this delegation and are: Alessander Khatissoff, Foreign Minister of the Armenian Republic, Member of the Peace Delegation; General G. Korganoff of the General Staff, Military Councillor of the Armenian Republic Peace Delegation; Avetis Aharonian, President of the Armenian National Council, President of the Armenian Republic Peace Delegation. However Babagianoff, another member of above-mentioned Delegation, did not reach the town and he is said to be more distingui-

⁴ Kalatosoff and Kapoian to der Abraamian, letter, June 21, 1918, 78-81, f. 44, position 57, Asia-Africa-Oceania III, AES.

⁵ Probably he was known by Khatissian, who has been major of Tiflis between 1910 and 1917.

shed than others and very influential since he was the Caucasus representative at the Russian Duma⁶.

Tahtadjian is not mentioned, and likewise on two other occasions: the first one when Khatissian and Aharonian visit Dolci at the premises in rue Djedidiè; the second when a few days later Dolci goes to Tokatlian Hotel, where the entire delegation has resided during the four-month stay in Constantinople:

Already on the outer door was a secretary (Kocharian) and a colonel of the Armenian General Staff (Ghorghanian), along with some young valets, wearing picturesque national costumes. I was soon ushered into a salon, where the President came towards me and introduced me to all the Mission members. In addition to the two who came to visit me at the delegation, it is made up of another gentleman, formerly a member of the Russian Duma, of a general, of the secretary and the colonel already named⁷.

Tahtadjian probably reaches the Marmara Sea site around August or September 1918: the official letter that the vicars of the administration of Armenian Catholics in Russia have given to him is delivered to der Abraamian's apartment in Rome on September 21.

The Great War, after four hard years, finally comes to an end: in October the government of Talaat Pacha falls, and the Ottoman Empire comes out from the first world conflict, defeated. Hussein Rauf Bey, new Turkish minister of the navy, tries to come to an agreement with Aharonian about the boundaries between Turkey and Armenia, before sailing to Mudros, on the isle of Lemnos, to ratify the armistice with the Allies. Rauf Bey promises to give back Kars and Ardahan and recognize the Ottoman border of 1914, "but the wheel turned a full circle and in October 1918, it was the Armenians that found the suggested Turkish

⁶ Dolci to Gasparri, report, July 5, 1918, 86-7, f. 44, pos. 57, Asia-Africa-Oceania III, AES. In Constantinople some Armenian delegates use the Russian version of their name.

⁷ Dolci to Gasparri, report, August 9, 1918, 4, f. 45, Asia-Africa-Oceania III, AES.

concessions unacceptable” (Hovannisian 1971, 55): the hopes to fulfill all the claims and receive international recognition of the Armenian State are now placed on the peace conference table that will open in Paris on January 1919.

Before sailing towards Batumi, Ferdinand Tahtadjian is appointed as Armenian *chargé d'affaires* in the Ottoman capital soon to be occupied by British forces. On October 28 Alexandre Khatissian submits a note to Dolci:

Before leaving Constantinople, I make it a pleasant duty for me to thank you once more in my name and on behalf of my comrades, for all the good proceedings that You have kindly used toward us and, in general, for the favour You nourish for our people. I take this opportunity to recommend again to Your Eminence our representative, Mr. Takhtadjian and I beg You to cover him with all Your high protection⁸.

The Armenian delegation leaves Constantinople for Erevan after the Armistice of Mudros (October 30).

The Holy See and the independence of Armenia

Having come to power in 1876, Sultan Abdul Hamid II closes the reforms season (*tanzimat*) and returns to an authoritarian policy exalting the Turkish nationalism. As soon as he has the suspicion that the Armenians are conspiring with Russia against the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, he doesn't hesitate to enforce a wild and widespread repression (1894–1896). Pope Leo XIII, “very saddened by the massacres of Christians that were taking place and deeply persuaded of the need to put an end to them” (Soderini 2010, 92) intervenes to stop the massacres or at least to avoid inflicting severe measures on the Armenian Catholics, arguing that, unlike the Orthodox prompted by

⁸ Khatissian to Dolci, letter, October 28, 1918, 13, f. 530, b. 102, DAT, AAV.

desire of a free homeland, the Catholics never have plotted against the Sublime Porte.

When in 1915 news reports a new oppression against the Armenians in Turkey, with mass deportations and executions, the Holy See does not “hesitate to engage its diplomatic network to intervene with the governments of Austria-Hungary and Germany to stop the massacres” (Ruyssen 2015, 14); Pope Benedict XV and the Secretary of State Gasparri introduce the idea that only the existence of an independent State would solve the Armenian question and give to those troubled people peace and security. By the end of 1916 Vatican supports the initiative launched by the United States, up to then in a neutral position, to find common points for a peace negotiating table; Gasparri promptly sends to the Nuncio in Vienna Teodoro Valfrè di Bonzo and to the *chargé d'affaires* in Munich Lorenzo Schioppa an acceptable plan to be presented to the Austrian and German authorities: at the word ‘Turkey’ it stated: “Pecuniary compensation for the loss of Armenia”⁹.

The American proposal doesn’t achieve a happy ending, but some months later, a papal appeal is made to the leaders of the belligerent people (August 1, 1917). Benedict XV issues a joint peace plan, calling for a spirit of equity and justice in the examination of territorial and political questions,

specifically those relating to Armenia, the Balkan States, and the countries which make up the ancient Kingdom of Poland, whose noble historical traditions and the sufferings it has undergone in particular during the present war ought rightly to enlist the sympathies of the nations¹⁰.

⁹ Gasparri to Valfrè di Bonzo and Schioppa, minute, December 20, 1916, 299, f. 470, pos. 1317, vol. 1, Stati Ecclesiastici III, AES.

¹⁰ Benedict XV, Letter to the Heads of the Belligerent Peoples, August 1, 1917, 268–71, f. 470, pos. 1317, vol. 3, Stati Ecclesiastici III, AES.

The note is ignored in its political context, and especially annoys the Ottoman government whose answer, undersigned by Sultan Mehmed V (September 1917) makes no mention of Armenia.

At the end of the war, even though it has been disclosed in a plan to debar the Holy See from the peace talks¹¹, Benedict XV goes ahead with its diplomatic activity aimed at a new enduring world balance based on justice; addressing the USA President Woodrow Wilson, the Pope pleads for the emancipation of the Polish and Armenian people:

We want to talk about Armenia. It is useless to recall how much this unfortunate nation suffered, especially in these last years! Although the Armenian people, for the most part, do not belong to the catholic religion, the Holy See, on several times, has taken care of his protection, either by a special mention in the Note to the Belligerent Powers of August 1, 1917, either by writing to the Sultan in favour of the poor Armenians, to obtain the cessation of the massacres, either by sending material help to soften in a little their suffering. But all this is useless if we do not recognize to the reunited Armenia the full independence, which it has earned from all points of view¹².

The Vatican looks with confidence at the independence delegations of Armenia. Since 1912, in Paris there is an active National Delegation headed by Boghos Nubar on behalf of Catholicòs Kevork V, aiming for the rights of the Ottoman Armenians. When in December 1918 Aharonian arrives in France, there are two Armenian committees, namely, the National Delegation under Nubar (re-elected on April 1919) and the Delegation of the Armenian Republic led by Aharonian. They have different ideas about the extension of the new State, but “despite this for the sake of a unified representation both men agreed to fun-

¹¹ The secret pact among France, Russia, Italy, and Great Britain undersigned in 1915 in London, is publicized two years later by Lenin.

¹² Benedict XV to Wilson, letter, November 8, 1918, 240-41, f. 470, pos. 1317, vol. 12, Stati Ecclesiastici III, AES.

ction as the Delegation of Integral Armenia” (Payaslian 2007, 153)¹³. In all future conferences,

independently or together, Boghos Nubar Pacha et Avedis Aharonian sought recognition of the Armenian republic, the repatriation of the Armenian refugees to Turkey, their resettlement by an Allied occupation force and the finding of a mandatory (Ter Minassian 1989, 168).

But the two delegations remain independent and supervise autonomous relations with the Holy See, intensifying them as efforts for an international recognition of the Armenian Republic become vain and new persecutions put at risk the Armenian population in Anatolia and in the Caucasus region. The Vatican, on the other hand, declares its concern for Armenia not only through letters to the Allies, but also allowing the Bishop of Trabzon Jean Naslian to attend the works at the peace conferences in Paris and in London as representative of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate¹⁴.

At the end of 1918 Mihran Damadian, Nubar’s agent in Italy, is given an audience with Gasparri, bringing to notice the secret treaties between Russia, England, and France (1916 and 1917) about the carve-up of Armenian territories; after two months, Aharonian arrives in Rome and has an audience with the Pope¹⁵. Following the Sovietization of Azerbaijan (April 1920), Aharonian denounces the unity between Bolshevism and Panturanism against the Republic of Armenia which, “has not

¹³ Nubar wants to include in the new State the Cilicia region; Aharonian reduces territorial requirements to west Anatolia and Caucasus.

¹⁴ Gasparri to Cesarano, telegram, January 28, 1920, 3, f. 46, pos. 57, Asia-Africa-Oceania III, AES. In April 1921 Naslian returns to Turkey as apostolic visitor of the Armenian Catholic Church; in association with the others two Armenian religious Chiefs, the Gregorian Zaven I and the Protestant Zénope Bezdjian, he works for the safeguard of Turkish Armenians.

¹⁵ Among the matters under discussion, the suggestion made by Aharonian of unifying the Armenian churches; but Antoine Delbuch, apostolic visitor in Caucasus, after a meeting with the Prime Minister Khatissian at Erevan considers the project unlikely.

received so far a single cartridge of his great allies”¹⁶. Even Nubar pleads for Benedict XV to intervene¹⁷.

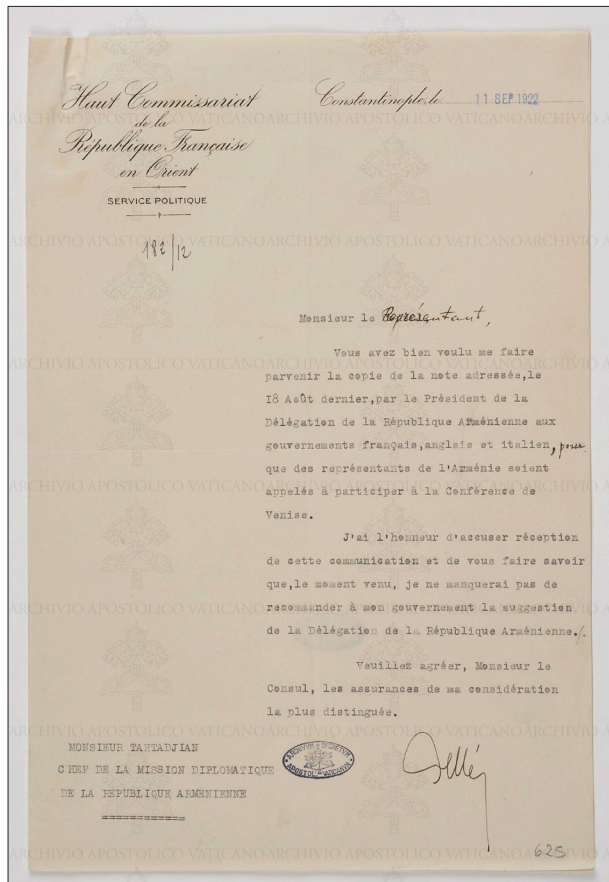
The fall of the Armenian government under the control of a Soviet committee (December 1920) is a tough blow for the independence aspirations of the Armenian delegations in Paris: nevertheless, they continue supporting the Sèvres Treaty (August 1920), which recognized territories now re-occupied by the army of the revolutionary government of Ankara led by Mustafa Kemal. During the London Conference in March 1921 the Allies promise to take into consideration the project of a National House (*Foyer*) for the Armenian refugees, undertaken by the League of Nations. But in October the French government officials announce the withdrawal of the occupation troops in Cilicia, and the concerns that the Armenians living in that region could suffer violence and persecutions, prompt especially Nubar to urge for the need of the *Foyer*, believing that the Holy See would support their claims. As a matter of fact, the Vatican diplomatic activity is considerable: Gasparri sets up the nunciatures in Paris and Berna during the international conferences, besides those of the League of Nations, maintaining correspondence on this issue both with the English (John Francis Charles de Salis) and French (Charles Jonnart) ministries at the Holy See. Gabriel Noradounghian, President of the National Delegation from 1922, plans to have permanent relationships with the Holy See to gain weight while the positions of Armenian delegations become less and less frail in the eyes of Allies, which by now regard Armenia as a part of Soviet Russia¹⁸. In addition, no single State is willing to be burdened with risks and costs of an international mandate in Caucasus to

¹⁶ Aharonian to Gasparri, telegram, May 1920, 61, f. 46, pos. 57, Asia-Africa-Oceania III, AES.

¹⁷ Nubar to Benedict XV, letter, June 8, 1920, 67-68, f. 46, pos. 57, Asia-Africa-Oceania III, AES.

¹⁸ In March 1922 Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaidjan merge into the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic.

find a suitable place to establish an Armenian National House; and, on the eve of the Conference in the city of Lausanne with representatives from Great Britain, France, Italy and Turkey, Aharonian reminds High Commissioner for Refugees, Fridtjof Nansen: “The Armenian case is not merely the settlement of a small number of expatriates”¹⁹. When at the end of 1922 Pius XI complains about “The belligerents of yesterday have laid down their arms but on the heels of this act we encounter new horrors and new threats of war in the Near East”²⁰, Aharonian and Noradounghian interpret the papal words on behalf of the project of a *Foyer* for Anatolic and Caucasian Armenians, that they are struggling for in the opened Swiss conference: the Armenian delegates are not admitted to the main table, but from



Communication from the High Commissioners on Armenian delegation in peace tables, 1922. Archivio Apostolico Vaticano

¹⁹ Aharonian, Avetis. 1966. “From Sardarapat to Sèvres and Lausanne. A political Diary. Part XIII.” *Armenian Review* 19 (2): 79.

²⁰ Pius XI, *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, December 27, 1922, http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-pi-xi_enc_19221223_ubi-arcano-dei-consilio.html, sec. 10.

Lausanne they submit appeals and a memorandum in sub-committees. The hopes of a National House soon vanish, due to Kemal's opposition: as early as the January 1923 the Nunc in Switzerland Luigi Maglione writes to Gasparri: "The representatives of Great Powers have surrendered all along the line"²¹.

Even amongst the Armenians of Constantinople things are changing: on January 1923 the Gregorian Patriarchate established a Turkish-Armenian rapprochement committee, and during a solemn banquet in the halls of the Tokatlian Hotel where Tahtadjian is lodged, Mgr. Arslanian assures the kemalist authorities that the Armenian people repudiate the *Foyer* plan. At this point the independence claims of the Armenian delegations in Paris are unheeded: after the settlement accomplished in Lausanne (July 27) Benito Mussolini, the Italian prime minister, orders the ambassador in Paris to address Noradounghian as a private person, "without any representative qualification"²².

The Apostolic delegation in Constantinople

When the first apostolic delegate in the Ottoman Empire was appointed in 1867, Pope Pius IX longed for stricter control of the oriental churches; furthermore, he hoped to gain self-government from France which, for a long time, had the authority of Christian's protection in Turkey, including the papal envoys, deriving from trading bargains known as Capitulations. But the delegation was not formally a diplomatic office like a nunciature was: the apostolic delegate had no say in

²¹ Maglione to Gasparri, report, January 13, 1923, 414-15, f. 150, b. 42, Archivio della Nunziatura in Svizzera, AAV. "This abandonment proves that the Armenian independence didn't appear to the Allies as a political necessity and that it had ceased to appear as a moral necessity": Mandel'stam 1926, 328.

²² Mussolini to Camillo R. Avezzana, telegram, September 22, 1923, f. 987, Armenia 1923, AP 1919-1930, MAE.

debating political issues with the Ottoman ministers, and he could not personally request an audience with the Sultan, but had to use the intermediation of the French ambassador, who in turn not only chaperoned the apostolic delegate to the sovereign residence of Dolma Batché, but also was always present at the meetings. This until October 1914, when Turkey declares war on Allied nations, and the French representative Luis Maurice Bompard is recalled. Early in December, after a long and uncomfortable train journey through Europe at war, the new apostolic delegate Angelo Maria Dolci arrives in Constantinople. His assignment appears at first awkward, and without the French patronage he has to put up with the serious measures against Christian minorities, which Ottoman authorities consider as an internal issue. To halt the religious persecution even the Vatican put into operation a persistent diplomatic activity at the government authorities of Turkish allies, Germany and Austria-Hungary; and directly to the Ottoman leaders. Nevertheless Dolci does not limit himself to sending reports to Rome, nor to be a merely executor of the instructions given by the Secretary of State and the holder of three letters of Pope Benedict XV to the Sultan: he frequently acts on his own initiative, going to official diplomatic meeting every week, urging the other ambassadors to intercede for Armenians, seeking and getting interviews with visir and ministers. He practically acts as a nuncio, “according to the distinctive trait of its mission: diplomatic ability, firmness and perseverance” (Karakhanian e Viganò 2016, 48); in an attempt to rescue from a famine outburst in 1916 the Syrian populations, with thousands of Armenian refugees in detention camps, he exerts himself to organize a relief mission with vessels flying pontifical flags: he gets the support of United States and Spain, and the Ottoman permission for the ships to land, but the war events (USA enters in war against Turkey on April 1917, and the British Army rises from the south) disrupt his plan.

For his effort in defending the victims of persecution, Dolci receives the gratitude from all the Armenians, along with the representatives

of the Republic of Armenia at Constantinople, who express their appreciation. Between Dolci and the delegation headed by Aharonian the meetings are friendly to the point that some future negotiation is mentioned, like the opening of diplomatic relationships and the recognition of an official delegation of the Catholic Patriarchate in the new Armenian State.

Dolci leaves Constantinople at the beginning of 1922: he will no longer return to the ancient town on Bosphorus as apostolic delegate²³. The vacant seat is taken by secretary Andrea Cesarano, who is so described by a report of the British High Commissioner Horace Rumbold: “Young and energetic prelate of no great presence, but great amiability”²⁴.

In October 1922 the Secretary of State Gasparri orders Francesco Marmaggi, at that time nuncio at Bucharest, to sail towards Turkey: “Coming news describe serious situation today, and perhaps, very serious tomorrow”²⁵. After the independent victory against the Greeks and the entry of the Turkish revolutionary troops in the city of Smyrna, the Holy See is concerned about the Christian’s grouping of west Anatolia and Constantinople too: Marmaggi, to whom are awarded the powers of apostolic delegate, has to monitor the situation and prevent the breaking up of diplomatic relations with Turks. He begs Maurice Pellé and Camillo Garroni, French and Italian High Commissioners, to accommodate the departure of Christians from Constantinople and to go on “issuing passports, demanding that the Turkish authorities follow

²³ Through August and November 1924 Dolci, nuncio at the Kingdom of Romania, is again in Istanbul for a special mission: after the Ankara government promulgated a decree which bans religious pictures and symbols from the rooms, libraries and other premises of foreign educational institutes, the Holy See wants to assert. Dolci is charged because of his good reputation.

²⁴ Rumbold to British Foreign Office, report, March 12, 1923, FO 371/9152, E2917/2917/44, TNA.

²⁵ Gasparri to Marmaggi, telegram, October 4, 1922, 23, f. 31, pos. 16, Turchia IV, AES.

through on these practices and do not prevent departures”²⁶. Marmaggi also makes an unsuccessful attempt to meet Kemal who is taking actions against Christians. At the beginning of 1923 he returns to Rumania. On March 31, 1923, Pius XI appoints Ernesto Filippi new delegate in Constantinople. But the outcome of a new conference in Lausanne, the ending of the secular Ottoman Empire and the creation of a new Turkish State lead the Holy See to postpone the assignment of an apostolic delegate: Filippi arrives in August just as apostolic visitor, with the task to examine the political situation and to work for Christians in Smyrna and Angora threatened to be exiled. In the middle of 1924 he has to leave Constantinople: Filippi is disliked by the new Turkish government due to a book translated from Arabic speaking about rituals for pilgrimage to the Mecca; and particularly because he is believed to be too close to the Italian government to such a point as to be addressed Mussolini’s delegate. The secretary Cesarano will carry on to supervise the apostolic delegation, until the arrival of Angelo Rotta around the middle of 1925: so for over four years, that is from the departure of Dolci to the arrival of Rotta, a titular does not practically head the Apostolic Delegation of Constantinople.

Dangerous days

I approached Constantinople with emotion. It was morning. Binoculars in hand, I scanned the distance, while our ship crossed the Bosphorus. We entered the port of Galata. The first thing that attracted my attention, was a merchant ship flaunting a great Armenian flag on its mast. It was a vessel that went back and forth between Batum and Constantinople. It belonged to a catholic trader of Smyrna. A little further, I had seen a boat with four young people. One of them held in his hand the Armenian tricolour: red, blue, orange. I realized they were coming

²⁶ Marmaggi to Pellé and Garroni, minute, undated, 80, f. 624, b. 117, DAT, AAV.

to meet me. Our eyes met, we greeted each other, then they quickly returned to the coast to announce my arrival to the huge crowd waiting for me. Immediately the armenian flags rose above the multitude: hats and handkerchiefs were brandished in the air...The ship docked. The gangway was thrown. The Patriarch, the press and several diplomatic agents, personal friends, the Representative of the Armenian Republic Ferdinand Takhtadjian, received me. The crowd assembled in a hall; one after the other, prominent personalities pronounced welcome address and presented me bouquets. They expressed in their speeches the joy at the success achieved by the armenian Government to all intents and purposes, they expressed their confidence in the outcome of the Loan. I gave them an exhaustive answer. I tell them: 'I bring you the greeting of all the Armenians!'. I arrived at the Tokatlian hotel accompanied by shouts and welcome cheers. Some rooms had been reserved for us, the armenian flags fluttered on the windows (Khatissian 1989, 212-213).

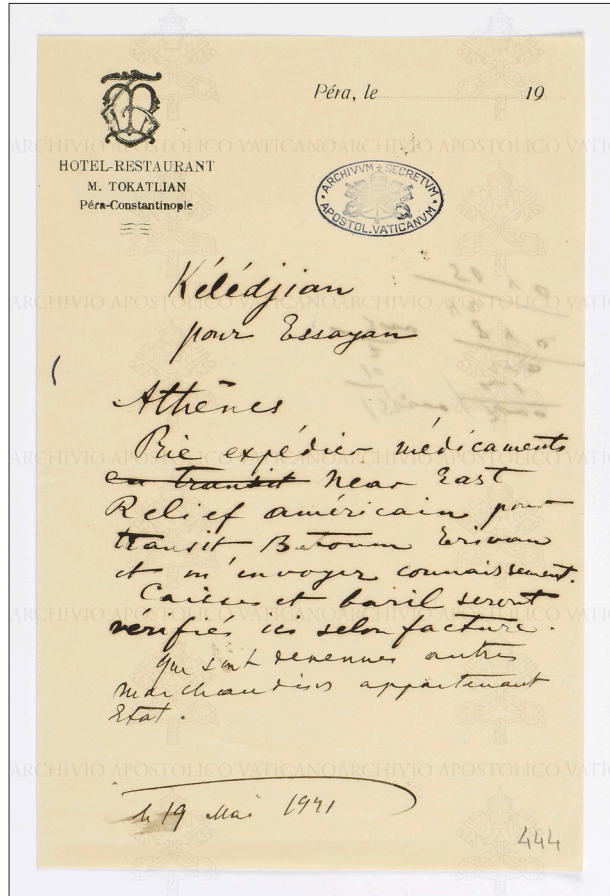
Alexandre Khatissian thus remembers his arrival in Constantinople in July 1920: he has been prime minister of the Republic of Armenia from June 1919 to May 1920 and now is travelling abroad on behalf of the Ohandjanian's government "to negotiate concessional terms for contracts with domestic and foreign enterprise" and to launch "a major campaign for the Independence Loan (supplemented by the Gold Fund) throughout the diasporan communities" (Payaslian 2007, 166). The armistice of Mudros surrendered the ancient city to the victorious Powers of the Great War, under the military administration of High Commissioners: the Armenians in Constantinople feel safe²⁷. Ferdinand Tahtadjian resides and works at the Tokatlian Hotel, where also the Georgian and Azeri representatives stay²⁸. His activity in accordance with the High Commissioners and Near East Relief proceeds smoothly; the Republic of Armenia, still with no international recognition, seems

²⁷ After the dissolution of the Ottoman parliament (March 1920), the Allies declare the will to protect the Armenians.

²⁸ The Azeri delegate is Jossif Bek Veziroff.

to be now underway: the Treaty of Sèvres (August 1920) effectively confirms the borders including the east Anatolian territories as declared by Erevan with the Act of United Armenia (May 26, 1919). But the transition of the State from republic to the military soviet regime (December 3, 1920) raises the question about the functions of Tahtadjian in Constantinople, in particular about the issue of passports: “While issuing passports, which the Allied authorities might not

recognize at all, I wonder whether I would not have to suspend the issuing until further notice”; “I can not draw up in the name of the Soviet Republic”²⁹. Khatissian, exiled and on journey to Paris, on February 1921 finds in Constantinople an atmosphere opposite to a few months before: “In the Armenian circles of the capital, the prevailing atmosphere was heavier” (1989, 298). In those days the *Dashnak* party



Note on the Tokatlian Hotel's headed paper, 1921. Archivio Apostolico Vaticano

²⁹ Tahtadjian to Aharonian, December 10 and 15, 1920, 203 and 207, f. 533, b. 102, DAT, AAV.

leads a rebellion in Erevan against the provisional Military Committee (*Revkom*) and creates an autonomous government in the Zangezur region: Tahtadjian communicates to the Allied High Commissioners the news about the events received from Paris via Tehran. Red Army regains control over all of Armenia and “on September 30 Soviet Russia and Armenia signed a treaty proclaiming unity” (Payaslian 2007, 170). The hesitations of western Powers about the Middle East and Caucasus settlement give reasons to the Armenian delegations in Paris for continuing their diplomatic efforts, and Ferdinand Tahtadjian resumes his activity as *chargé d'affaires* of the Armenian Republic, without material changes, during 1921 and 1922.

In August 1922 Mustafa Kemal launches a great offensive for reconquering Asia Minor: the Greek army is swept away and Turkish troops head direct to Bosphorus. Some thousands fleeing pour into Constantinople from Trebizond and other places on Black Sea, and they relate the threats of Turkish authorities that have put them out of work and home. But it is the stories of violence and massacres of those who survived the kemalist seizure of Smyrna that throw into panic the Christian population of the capital; Marmaggi, just arrived, writes:

During a drive in the city, I noticed the state of ferment and restlessness of this population. The day before –as far as I was told– the Christians were seized by true panic, on the occasion of a great Turkish demonstration, during which there were no shortage of victims. I was assured that now the Allied authorities had forbidden any demonstration, but that all the same hung over all of them, like a ghost, the terror of the fire and the massacre, which could have given still rise to an accident that exacerbated Muslim fanaticism³⁰.

The armistice of Moudania (October 11, 1922) seems to avert the risk of a war between the Turkey of Kemal and the occupying forces in Constantinople, but the requests of Ankara government are more and more

³⁰ Marmaggi to Gasparri, report, October 5, 1922, 72-5, f. 1, b. 359, Segreteria di Stato 1925, AAV.

urgent: the civil administration of the city, the checks of passports, the port control, and an independent police force. The situation remains strained for Armenians who live in Constantinople, for Tahtadjian too: “Serious situation. Take urgent measures to guarantee my safety and departure”³¹. Worried about the news coming from Constantinople, Avetis Aharonian turns to the French government, as related by Emmanuel Peretti de La Rocca, chief political and commercial officer of ministry of foreign affairs:

Mr. Aharonian asks to telegraph the instructions to General Pellé. He pointed out that M. Tahtadjian is alone in Constantinople to represent the interests of many Armenians and that he issues more than 1,000

passports per day. I told Mr. Aharonian to recommend to Mr. Tahtadjian to address General Pellé, who will certainly do his utmost³².

THE EASTERN TELEGRAPH COMPANY, LIMITED. PERA STATION.
(Received Message Form.)

Local No. 1140 * Time 13 By Clerk 263
TELEGRAM To: No. 189 Words 13 Date 11/11/25 Time 1715
TELEGRAM From: Alexandria
REMARKS: To: RP10 Tahtadjian Hotel
Tokatlisan Pera
Cablez si trouvez constantinople vous cablerai argent
Tahadjian Alexandrie
Suis ici. Pouvez faire route annonce Paris.
6/9/11/25 Tahadjian 865

Tahtadjian confirms his presence in Constantinople, 1923. Archivio Apostolico Vaticano

The opening of the peace conference in Lausanne defuses the tension in the capital, even if the future of Constantinople remains thick with uncertainties, as that of Tahtadjian.

In early February 1923 the news that Lord Curzon, UK foreign minister, has broken off the negotiation and the Turkish delegation headed

³¹ Tahtadjian to Aharonian, telegram, November 11, 1922, *Documents diplomatiques français: 1922*, (Bruxelles: P. Lang 2008), 2: 498.

³² Ibid.

by Ismet Pachà has left Switzerland, hurls down Constantinople into the same state of distress as a few months before. Furthermore, the specter of a new imminent conflict is looming: Athens lines up several military divisions along the river of Maritsa, and Turks mass soldiers in Thrace. London, Paris, and Rome are not willing to defend the garrison on Bosphorus at all costs, and the military chiefs in Constantinople resolve in case of Turkish attack to move troops on the Dardanelles, as reported by Felice Maissa, the Italian High Commissioner *ad interim*:

And it is only this the way to protect the Christian population of Constantinople in the current predicaments. I do not mean that it would necessarily lead to a slaughter of Christians; but when the defeated Turkish troops retreated towards Constantinople, the danger would be great and the memory of Smyrna it's too recent for it not to be taken into account³³.

In the meantime they arrange for the evacuation of their respective colonies. The resumption of talks in Lausanne (April 23), at this moment does not relieve the fears of Christians, even if the Turkish police, more and more self-governing, carries out among the Armenians house and body searches and interrogations; a lot of them are arrested, accused to be incendiaries³⁴.

Not only men, but also archives are at risk: on September 21, 1922, Cesarano, vicar of the apostolic delegation, writes: "For any eventuality I will certainly provide for Archive"³⁵. What Cesarano's plan was we do not know, although the records have remained in his hands. Different situation is for the archive of the apostolic visitor of the Armenian Catholic Church: Naslian is disliked by the kemalists for his conciliation

³³ Maissa to Mussolini, report 5696/777, May 19, 1923, f. 1682, Turchia 1923, AP 1919-1930, MAE.

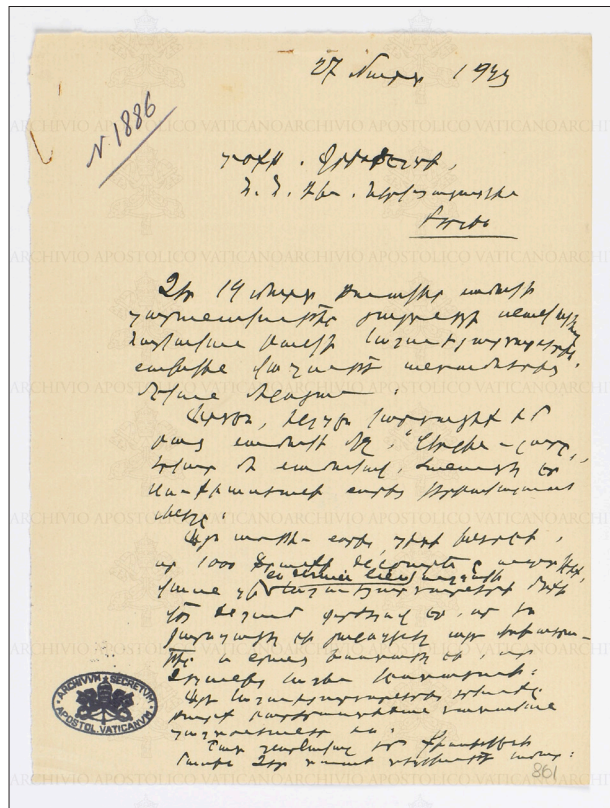
³⁴ Armenians are suspected of having weapons to commit attacks.

³⁵ Cesarano to Gasparri, telegram, September 21, 1922, 5, f. 29, pos. 10, Turchia IV, AES.

role in the Armenian cause, and after some unstable months³⁶, he leaves Constantinople toward Rome on June, 1923, bringing with him the archive containing momentous documents about the ecclesiastic assessment of Gomidas Kaumurdjian³⁷. Even the diplomatic archives are protected: according to Felice Maissa, the British Embassy “for some time already has sent the archive to Malta”³⁸.

The departure of Tahtadjian and the need to preserve the archive

In Ferdinand Tahtadjian’s archive reserved in the Vatican, the last minute that states the archive number (no. 1886) marked by the *chargé d’affaires* goes back to March 27 and addressed to Paris: there are 22 other subsequent papers (the last one is dated August 21,



The last note with archive number, 1923. Archivio Apostolico Vaticano

³⁶ On October 1922 Marmaggi is ready to give Naslian asylum in the apostolic delegation, or to favor his escape from Constantinople.

³⁷ Gomidas is declared blessed by Pius XI on June 23, 1929.

³⁸ Maissa to Mussolini, telegram 82, February 1, 1923, f. 1683, Turchia 1923, AP 1919-1930, MAE.

1923, from the Armenian Diplomatic Mission in Berlin), five of these written by Tahtadjian but without the sequence number³⁹. Based on these elements, we can assume the documents of Tahtadjian's archive have been transferred amongst the papers of the Apostolic Delegation in Constantinople in two different moments. Mere supposition because in the apostolic delegation archive there are no documents or receipts referring to the delivery of these files.

As we have seen, at the end of 1922 and in the spring of 1923 the city on Bosphorus seems close to capitulating; in fact, between February and July 1923, the Inter-Allied forces are longer in a position to insure human rights, properties, and even the lives of the residing Christians. It is likely that in the middle of the crisis, between March and April, the representative of the Republic of Armenia, at the request of the Armenian representatives in Paris⁴⁰, thought-out a way to protect the documentation from falling into Turkish hands. The Vatican delegation, unlike other diplomatic seatings, would not get implicated in a war and it appears to be the best solution, even for one day regain the archive. It should not be ruled out the Catholic denomination of Tahtadjian. After this first consign, Tahtadjian carries on his activity at the Tokatlian Hotel, despite the growing problems in sending and receiving correspondence⁴¹. The departing mail has no progressive number, maybe because he does not have the possibility to validate and track the right sequence or wait to reorganize the papers, nor to hide the existence of an archive in case of an inspection by the kemalist police.

On July 24 France, Great Britain, Italy, Greece, Japan, Rumania and the Turkish National Movement sign the Peace Treaty in Lausanne: it provides the reversion of Constantinople and the Straits under the

³⁹ The last is dated June 21 and addressed to Mr. Kouyoumdjian in Sofia.

⁴⁰ The *Dashnak* archives, housed in Watertown, Boston, hold several files of the First Armenian Republic and records of the Armenian delegations abroad after 1920.

⁴¹ After the Lausanne Treaty the Allies post office are shutting down.

Turkish power into the borders of the new State whose capital will be Ankara; and the Allied armies have six weeks to evacuate. The High Commissioners, whose main concern is arranging for the removal of the troops in an orderly matter, takes care of the departure of civilians who want to go away from the city. General Ernesto Mombelli, commander of the Italian occupying corps, communicates to Rome: "The three generals have resolved to maintain the control over the passports and the Constantinople port till the last day in order to ensure the departure of those persecuted by the Turkish police"⁴². But panic is coming up again amid Christians. The large number of refugees is causing concern amongst the European governments: only for the Armenians situation, France and England have implemented restrictions on their entry.

London has to face up with the position of 80 Armenians with 116 dependents considered undesired because they have been employed by the British military authorities during the occupation of Constantinople. It is Charles Harrington, British general officer commanding, to bring up the issue in a letter to the War Office in which argues that the lives of these Armenians would be endangered if they were to remain in Turkey: "They are compromised so seriously with the Turks that no amnesty or general pardon would cover them"⁴³, Harrington proposes to bring them to England, but in London the Army Council "understands that both the Treasury and the Home Office would have strong objections to bringing these people in this Country particularly in view of the public feeling that might be aroused owing to the present state of unemployment"⁴⁴. At the end, since Egypt, Palestine and

⁴² Mombelli to Mussolini, report 728/3, August 9, 1923, f. 1689, Turchia 1923, AP 1919-1930, MAE.

⁴³ Harrington to British War Office, telegram, August 20, 1923, FO 371/9160, E8500/7120/44, TNA.

⁴⁴ War Office to the colonial under-secretary, September 3, 1923, FO 371/9160, E8901/7120/44, TNA

Iraq are not taken in consideration due to these territory's conditions which render such set up not feasible, the Armenians are temporarily transferred in the isle of Cyprus.

Annoyed at the new refugees landing in Marseille at the end of October, Raymond Poincaré, head of the French government and foreign minister, reminds the High Commissioner Gaston Jessé-Curély:

By telegram 541, of September 3rd, I asked you to give instructions so that no contingent of Armenians and other refugees should be directed to France without the prior authorization of my department. By telegram 595, of October 4th, I pointed out to you the serious difficulties resulting from the mass arrival of Armenians who refuse the works they are offered. Give the consulate the formal order to refuse any visa for Armenians and warn the ship-owners and the shipping companies that the French authorities will oppose the disembarkation of any refugee whose passport is not regularly certified⁴⁵.

When Poincaré dictates the aforesaid telegram, Ferdinand Tahtadjian has already left Constantinople. The *Foreign Office Indexes to general correspondence, 1923* reports the news of the departure of Tahtadjian from Constantinople. Unfortunately the document no.9473 has not survived, so we have no information about the circumstances of his leaving. Certainly, after the Treaty of Lausanne, Tahtadjian has a straight choice but he is on predicament: he has no diplomatic cover, the State he is acting no longer exists and the western Powers are now opting for the recognition of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics declared by Lenin at the end of 1922, to which belongs the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic⁴⁶. Tahtadjian has to leave the city before his handover to the Ankara government, otherwise be arrested by the Turkish police because lacking of valid documents and his life would be

⁴⁵ Poincaré to Jessé-Curély, October 28, 1923, *Documents diplomatiques français: 1923*, (Bruxelles: P. Lang 2013), 2: 438.

⁴⁶ In early 1923 acts in Constantinople a representative of the Soviet Armenia, Mr. Maghinjian, who contacts the Armenian Catholic Visitor Naslian.

forces and the entry of the Turkish troops (October 6). Possibly, prior to leaving, he entrusts the apostolic delegation with the documents gathered after the first delivery, but this time fearful of never retrieving the entire archive.

Final archival note

At present the collection of documents of the representative of the first Republic of Armenia are kept in boxes referred to the mission of Angelo Maria Dolci in Constantinople. We know that Dolci has been far from Turkey since early 1922 and the secretary Andrea Cesarano treats the affairs of the apostolic delegation in vacant position, till the appointment of the new delegate, Ernesto Filippi, in March 1923. We know also that Tahtadjian has handled his archive, or part of it, until the end of August 1923. The arrangement of records of the apostolic delegation in Archivio Apostolico Vaticano is in accordance with the delegates successors order: why then Tahtadjian's records are retained under the Dolci's series? For several reasons.

First of all because the period covered by Tahtadjian's activity (1919-1923) overlaps almost entirely with the mission of Dolci. Moreover, after Lausanne, the mission in Turkey of Filippi was demoted to apostolic visit: the current index of the apostolic delegation in Turkey reports that, at the moment of their transfer to the Vatican⁴⁸, the Filippi's records was stored in an original file titled 'Filippi' with papers collected from August 17, 1923, to May 27, 1924. The papers were shared out, some under Dolci's items and mostly gathered with documents of the subsequent delegate Angelo Rotta (1925-1930). In the same way, the activity of Cesarano has been considered as an extension of Dolci's mandate whose period is longer than his formal regency.

⁴⁸ Approximately 30 years after their production.

Finally because, as we assume, the most part of the Armenian *chargé d'affaires* archive has been entrusted to Cesarano before Filippi was in Constantinople. Actually the Tahtadjian's archive, when it arrived in Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, was originally stored not in the file named 'Filippi', but in folders referred to Dolci's period.

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Archival sources and abbreviations

Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (AAV)

- Archivio della Delegazione Apostolica in Turchia (DAT)
- Archivio della Nunziatura in Svizzera
- Segreteria di Stato 1925

Archivio della Sacra Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari (AES)

- Asia-Africa-Oceania III
- Stati Ecclesiastici III
- Turchia IV

Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (MAE)

- Affari politici 1919-1930 (AP)

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The British National Archive (TNA)

- Foreign Office (FO)