



## **Armenian Terror against Turks in Italy and the Italian Public Opinion**

**Mevlüt ÇELEBİ<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Armenians used terror as an effective tool in their struggle for independence against the Ottoman Empire. It is possible to examine the terrorist activities of Armenians against the Ottoman Empire and later the Republic of Turkey in three stages. First, the Ottoman Bank raid in Istanbul (August 26, 1896) and assassination against Sultan Abdul Hamit II (July 21, 1905). The second is the Nemesis operations they organized to take revenge against the leaders of the Union and Progress Party, which took the deportation decision in 1915 after the Armistice of Mudros. The third stage is the attacks they launched against the Turkish diplomats in different countries around the globe in the 1970s. This article examines the attacks of Armenian terrorist organizations against Turks in Italy. These are the murder of Sait Halim Pasha, the grand vizier of the Ottoman Government, which took the deportation decision (6 December 1921), the martyrdom of Turkey's Vatican Ambassador Taha Carım, (9 June 1977), the injury of Turkey's Vatican Ambassador Vecdi Türel (April 17, 1980), and the second secretary of the Turkish Embassy in Rome, Gökberk Ergenekon (October 25, 1981). In our study, in which we used Italian sources, the repercussions of the assassinations in the Italian public opinion were examined.

**Keywords:** Armenian Terror, Armenian Terror in Italy, Sait Halim Pasha, Taha Carım, Vecdi Türel, Gökberk Ergenekon, Arshavir Shiragian, Monte Melkonian.

## **İtalya'da Türklere Karşı Ermeni Terörü ve İtalyan Kamuoyu**

### **Özet**

Çok uluslu bir yapıya sahip olan Osmanlı Devleti'nde, Türk olmayan unsurlar, 19. yüzyılda kendi devletlerini kurmak için bağımsızlık mücadelesine başladılar. Bu halklardan birisi de uzun yüzyıllar Anadolu'da Türklere birlikte yaşayan Ermenilerdir. Ermeniler de bağımsızlık mücadelelerinde, Osmanlı Devleti'ne karşı ayaklanmalar çıkarttılar, Avrupa devletlerinden yardım gördüler ve terörü amaçlarına ulaşmak için etkili bir silah olarak kullandılar. Ermenilerin Osmanlı Devleti'ne ve daha sonra Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne karşı terör faaliyetlerini üç aşamada incelemek mümkündür. Birincisi, Osmanlı Devleti'nin son zamanlarında İstanbul'da Osmanlı Bankası'nı basmaları (26 Ağustos 1896) ve Sultan II. Abdülhamit'e karşı suikast düzenlemeleridir. (21 Temmuz 1905) İkincisi, Mondros Mütarekesi'nden sonra, 1915'te tehcir kararı alan İttihat ve Terakki Partisi'nin liderlerine karşı intikam almak amacıyla düzenledikleri Nemesis operasyonlarıdır. Üçüncü aşama da 1970'lerde dünyanın değişik ülkelerindeki Türk diplomatlarına karşı başlattıkları saldırılardır. Bu yazıda Ermeni terör örgütlerinin Türklere karşı İtalya'da yaptıkları saldırılar incelenmektedir. Bu çerçevede İtalya'da ikisi ölümle, ikisi yaralanmayla sonuçlanan dört saldırı incelenmektedir. Bunlar, Tehcir kararı alan Osmanlı Hükümeti'nin sadrazamı Sait Halim Paşa'nın öldürülmesi (6 Aralık 1921), Türkiye'nin Vatikan Büyükelçisi Taha Carım'ın şehit edilmesi, (9 Haziran 1977), Türkiye'nin Vatikan Büyükelçisi Vecdi Türel'in yaralanması (17 Nisan 1980) ve Türkiye'nin Roma Büyükelçiliği İkinci Kâtibi Gökberk Ergenekon'a karşı saldırıdır. (25 Ekim 1981). Çalışmamızda Türk ve İtalyan kaynakları birlikte kullanılmıştır. Suikastların Türk ve İtalya kamuoyundaki yankıları ve ele alınmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ermeni Terörü, İtalya'da Ermeni Terörü, İtalya ve Ermeni Meselesi, Sait Halim Paşa, Taha Carım, Vecdi Türel, Gökberk Ergenekon.

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Dr., Ege University, Faculty of Letters, Department of History, İzmir. E-mail: mevlutcelebi@yahoo.com. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8244-661X>



## **Introduction**

The independence movements, fed by the idea of Nationalism spread by the French Revolution, began to show their effects in the Ottoman Empire in a short time. Non-Muslims living in other parts of the empire and meanwhile in Anatolia also participated in the revolts that started especially in the Balkans. One of these communities was Armenians. The most important aspect of the Armenian independence movement that distinguishes it from other nations is the effective use of terrorist acts. It is probably not a coincidence that the Hinchak Committee was established in Geneva in 1887 and the Dashnak Committee in 1890 in order to organize the Armenian revolts and terrorist acts.<sup>2</sup>

We think that it would be appropriate to evaluate the terror perpetrated by the Armenians against the Turks in three stages. The first period is from the 1890s until the Armistice of Mudros. The two most important actions in this period, the Ottoman Bank raid (26 August 1896) and an assassination attempt against Sultan Abdul Hamit II. (July 21, 1905), the raid on the Ottoman Bank, which was the “Central Bank” of the Ottoman Empire, is the most important event up to that time in terms of introducing the Armenian issue to the world and its impact.<sup>3</sup>

The second stage is the period of revenge attacks on behalf of Nemesis, the ancient Greek goddess of justice and revenge, after the Armistice of Mudros. At the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Dashnak Armenian Revolutionary Federations, which gathered in Yerevan on September 27-October 3, 1919, it was decided to take action for retaliation and revenge. The Armenians first compiled a list of Unionist leaders and Ottoman rulers, whom they claimed were responsible for the deportations and deaths. Sait Halim Pasha was also included in this list as the head of the government that took the deportation decision. At the 27<sup>th</sup> Dashnak Regional Conference convened on July 8, 1920, the assassination to be launched against the Unionists was called “Nemesis.”<sup>4</sup> The third stage of Armenian terrorism is the attacks against Turkish diplomats working abroad, which started in 1973. In this context, three terrorist attacks were carried out in Italy, one of which was fatal and two of which caused injury.

## **1. The Murder of Said Halim Pasha**

### **1.1. Assassination**

---

<sup>2</sup> Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (London: University of California Press, 1975), 104-131; 151-163.

<sup>3</sup> Francis P. Hyland, *Armenian Terrorism: The Past, the Present, the Prospects*, Routledge (London and New York: Taylor&Francis Group, 2021), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Bogosian, *Operation Nemesis: The Assassination Plot that Avenged the Armenian Genocide* (New York: Little, Brown&Company, 2015), 110-111.



## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

Said Halim Pasha was born in Cairo in 1864. He is the grandson of the Governor of Egypt Kavalalı Mehmed Ali Pasha. He settled in Istanbul in 1870 with his family. He completed his university education in the field of political sciences in Switzerland. He was given the rank of civil pasha by Abdul Hamid II. He was expelled from Istanbul in 1903 for having relations with the Young Turks. After the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy, he returned to Istanbul with other Unionists. He was elected as the general secretary of the Committee of Union and Progress in 1912. The following year, he was appointed to the office of grand vizier. The treaty of alliance with Germany on August 2, 1914, was made in his mansion. The most important event during his time as the Grand Vizier was the Ottoman Empire's entry into World War I. He was arrested on March 10, 1919, within the framework of the arrests made on charges of war and "Armenian Genocide" after the Armistice of Mudros. He was exiled by the British on 28 May 1919, first to Lemnos and then to Malta. When he was released on April 29, 1921, he went to Italy. He was martyred by Armenian terrorist Arshavir Shiragian on 6 December 1921 in Rome. His body was brought to Istanbul and after the funeral ceremony held on January 29, 1922, he was buried next to his father in the garden of Mahmut II Tomb.<sup>5</sup>

When Sait Halim Pasha left Malta, he first settled in a hotel in Palermo, Italy. Later, they settled in a hotel in Rome with his old friend Tefvik Azmi Bey. After spending the summer in Frascati, 30 kilometers from Rome, they returned to Rome and rented an apartment at the Palace Hotel. They later rented an apartment in Count Alberto Massei's villa at Bartolomeo Eustachio Street, No: 18. Here they started to live with servant Bilal, the Italian cook, the maid from Naples, and the Swiss waiter.

Sait Halim Pasha was killed with a single bullet by the Armenian terrorist Arshavir Shiragian on Tuesday, December 6, 1921. The assassination was carried out as follows: After lunch, Pasha and his friend Azmi Bey went out at 13: 30 and toured the museums in the Capitole. The visit was completed at 16: 00. They returned to their residence in a coach under Guglielmo Fiori. At this time, it was 5: 15 p.m. While Azmi Bey was getting out of the car and paying for the taxi, a short, stocky, dark-coloured man came out of the door he was hiding and headed for the coach. He stood on the side of the old grand vizier, who was about to descend, and shot Sait Pasha in the forehead with a single shot with a pistol. Pasha collapsed on the chair. While fleeing the scene, the killer was trying to drive away those who wanted to catch him by waving his gun. Azmi Bey, the coachman and Bilal went after the attacker. When the killer disappeared, they returned to the scene. When the murderer disappeared, they returned to the scene and carried Pasha to the hospital. Professor Caravani and Doctors

---

<sup>5</sup> İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal, "Mehmed Said Halim Paşa", *Son Sadrazamlar IV* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1982) 1893-1932; M. Hanefi Bostan, "Said Halim Paşa (1864-1921)", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 35 (2008), 557-560.



## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

Carossi, Martinozzi and Bani, who were the first responders to Pasha, determined that the former grand vizier was dead.<sup>6</sup>

The most important point emphasized by the Italian newspapers, which announced the news of the assassination the next day, was why and by whom the murder was committed. Various predictions and assumptions were made from day one. While almost every newspaper pointed out that the assassination was a political murder and that the murderer was a foreigner, some did not hesitate to write that this foreigner was Armenian. While *La Stampa* stated that “The murderer is a foreigner, he must know his victim and know his habits”<sup>7</sup>, the Socialist Party’s media organ *Avanti!* wrote that the murderer was a foreigner.<sup>8</sup> Some Italian newspapers openly stated that the murderer, described as “foreigner”, was an Armenian. One of them, *L’Epoca*, wrote that the cold-blooded gunman who shot Sait Halim was an Armenian gunman.<sup>9</sup> *Il Secolo* also reported that the murder was thought to have been committed by Greeks or Armenians living in Rome. The newspaper used the subheading “An Armenian”, referring to the murderer, and Tevfik Azmi’s “An Armenian! He pointed out that he was shouting “An Armenian.”<sup>10</sup> With similar statements, *Corriere della Sera* stated that the murderer of the Prince, who was the victim of a political murder, should be sought among the Armenian community living in Rome.<sup>11</sup> *L’Idea Nazionale* also stated that the act was persistently rumored to be an Armenian act, and that the investigators reduced the suspects to five Armenians.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Il Messaggero*, December 7, 1921; *La Stampa*, December 7, 1921; *L’Epoca*, December 7, 1921; *Il Secolo*, December 7, 1921; *Corriere della Sera*, December 8, 1921; *L’Idea Nazionale*, December 8, 1921; *Avanti!*, December 8, 1921. The killer Arshavir Shiragian briefly describes the assassination, which he gave an incorrect date as December 5, 1921: “I heard the sound of the coach coming first. Then the horses that came over me. I was excited. I could see Sait Halim and his bodyguard. At the same time, we came face to face with Sait Halim. “Yaren –Friend” he called to his bodyguard in a pleading voice. This was his last word. I aimed the muzzle at his right temple and fired. He slumped into the coach. The horses started galloping. At the same time, Tevfik Azmi drew his gun. I said, ‘I’ll shoot your gun. He threw the gun into the street. Now I had to get out of the car and get away from here. The horses were running fast, and they stopped in front of the Pasha’s mansion. After jumping out of the car, I aimed my gun and tried to keep people away. It got crowded. People surrounded me. I told them it was a political assassination. They didn’t mind, I shot at the pavement, made room for myself and started running. I heard Tevfik Azmi’s voice behind me. He was telling them to catch me. My followers were not leaving me. I ran away from my followers by running into the garden of a house. Out on Nomentana Avenue, I threw my gun under a pile of rubble. I was saved.” Arşavir Şıracıyan, *Bir Ermeni Teröristin İtirafı*, trans. Kadri Mustafa Orağlı (İstanbul: Kastaş Yayınları, 2006), 182-187.

<sup>7</sup> *La Stampa*, December 7, 1921.

<sup>8</sup> *Avanti!*, December 8, 1921.

<sup>9</sup> *L’Epoca*, December 7, 1921.

<sup>10</sup> *Il Secolo*, December 7, 1921.

<sup>11</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, December 8, 1921.

<sup>12</sup> *L’Idea Nazionale*, December 8, 1921.



## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

Although certain information was given that the attacker was an Armenian, the murderer could not be caught. Years later, when his memoirs were published, it was learned that the murderer was Armenian Arshavir Shiragian. Born in 1900 in Istanbul, Shiragian grew up in a house where members of the Armenian revolutionary organization held meetings. He murdered the Armenian Vahe İhsan (27 March 1920) on the grounds that he was a “traitor”, with the task given by the Execution Bureau established in 1919. When he was given the task of killing Sait Halim Pasha, he went to Rome in the summer of 1921 and started to follow his tracks. When he came across Tefvik Azmi, he followed him to the Pasha and killed him on 6 December 1921. Returning to Istanbul, Shiragian went to Germany as part of the Nemesis operations and killed Bahattin Şakir and Trabzon Governor Cemal Azmi in Berlin on April 17, 1922. Arshavir Shiragian, who later settled in the United States in 1923, began to write his memoirs in 1965. Filled with false information, like a movie script, his memoirs, in which he portrays himself as a hero, were published by his daughter Sonia Shiragian in 1976, three years after his death.<sup>13</sup> Shiragian’s memoirs were translated into Turkish and published in 1997 and 2006.<sup>14</sup> Shiragian’s memoirs were also translated into Italian.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.2. Investigations

With the news of the assassination, the Italian authorities started an intense but fruitless attempt to catch the murderer or killers. Deputy Prosecutor Francesco Forlenga and Judicial Inspector Guido Mazzucchetti came to the hospital and took statements from Tefvik Azmi Bey and the maid Bilal. Azmi Bey said that he thought the action was carried out by an Armenian. From the Porta Pia Police Station, where the assassination took place, Commissioner Giurati and Deputy Commissioner Dr. Ferrara, they sealed the two rooms where the Pasha lived. Italian police officers questioned the Swiss maid and the Neapolitan cook.<sup>16</sup> Italian police conducted a search of the former grand vizier’s apartment. In a drawer in the study, they found documents written in English and French about the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war.<sup>17</sup>

The murder of a statesman who served as grand vizier in the Ottoman Empire in Rome is a murder that should embarrass Italy. That’s why the Italian police started a serious investigation process to catch the killer. They sought the information of the people who

<sup>13</sup> Arshavir Shiragian, *The Legacy, Memoirs of an Armenian Patriot*, trans. Sonia Shiragian (Watertown, Massachusetts: Hairenik Press, 1976), 218 p.

<sup>14</sup> Arşavir Şıracıyan, *Bir Ermeni Teröristin İtirafı*, trans. Kadri Mustafa Orađlı (İstanbul: Kastaş Yayınları, 1997, 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Arshavir Shiragian, *Condannato a uccidere. Memorie di un patriota armeno* (Milano: Guerini E Associati, 2005)

<sup>16</sup> *Il Messaggero*, December 7, 1921; *L’Idea Nazionale*, December 8, 1921.

<sup>17</sup> *L’Epoca*, December 7, 1921; *La Stampa*, December 8, 1921; *Corriere d’Italia*, December 8, 1921; *Avanti!*, December 8, 1921.



## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

---

witnessed the incident, especially the coachman, along with the people who lived with and looked after the service of the Pasha.<sup>18</sup> The coachman Guglielmo Fiori, who brought Pasha and Azmi Bey to their home during the interrogations, gave important information. Fiori said that they found a coach at the exit of Lazzaro Spallanzani Street, blocking the street so that they could not move forward, and gave the following information:

*“I was coming from Tomacelli Street, Prince and his friend got into my coach from a painting store. Returning to the desolate Bartolomeo Eustachio Street, I saw a short, stocky young man with an American moustache come out through a door into the street. He approached the carriage, which had stopped in front of the prince’s house, and took a pistol from his pocket and fired at the prince. I didn’t even have time to be surprised. I saw the youth run away quickly and hastily, heard a scream and turned around: The prince was slumped on his back in the coach.”<sup>19</sup>*

A construction was underway on the street where the assassination took place. The Italian police applied to the testimony of Giuseppe Moncadi, who worked as a bricklayer at this construction. The master said that a stranger took off his jacket and threw it to move more comfortably while fleeing in the direction of Via Lazzaro Spallanzani, and then disappeared towards Via Nomentana. Moncadi added that he saw two persons picking up the escaper’s discarded clothes and then disappearing into the alley. Master stated that many people gathered at the scene and commented on the incident and gave another important information. He added that he had heard two people with foreign accents and clothes asking the doorkeeper Egisto Pini if the prince was dead. Receiving the answer that he was dead, he reported that these two people had moved away.<sup>20</sup>

Italian police searched all hotels in Rome to catch the killer.<sup>21</sup> These efforts of the Italian police did not yield any results, as the Italian newspapers of the period insistently stated. It is not known how the incompetence of the Italian police played a role in this, and how effective the protection of him by Greek and Armenian diplomats, as the terrorist confessed<sup>22</sup>, was not known, but the murderer Shiragian easily left Rome and returned to Istanbul. The murder of Pasha and the subject of the investigation came up again in the 1930s. The newspaper Son Posta, dated August 24, 1931, wrote that the Italian police requested information about the murder of Sait Halim Pasha from a “well-known person” living in the Bosphorus.<sup>23</sup> When this news appeared in the Cumhuriyet newspaper the next day<sup>24</sup>, Tevfik

---

<sup>18</sup> *Corriere d’Italia*, December 8, 1921; *Il Giornale d’Italia*, December 8, 1921.

<sup>19</sup> *Il Secolo*, December 7, 1921.

<sup>20</sup> *L’Idea Nazionale*, December 8, 1921.

<sup>21</sup> *Corriere d’Italia*, December 8, 1921.

<sup>22</sup> Şiracıyan, *Bir Ermeni Teröristin İtirafı* (2006), 200.

<sup>23</sup> *Son Posta*, August 24, 1931



## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

Azmi Bey, who was mentioned in the news as the person who was next to Sait Halim Pasha, felt the need to make a statement. He made a statement to the newspapers *Yeni Gün*<sup>25</sup> and *Son Posta*<sup>26</sup> and sent a letter to the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*<sup>27</sup>, explaining that no information was requested from him. The murder of Sait Halim Pasha was forgotten for many years, like many similar events.

### **2. The Murder of Taha Carım**

#### **2.1. Assassination**

In the 1970s, Armenian terrorism came back to the world agenda with attacks that resulted in the deaths of many innocent Turks and foreigners. The first action of Armenian terrorists against Turkish diplomats was carried out in the United States. On January 27, 1973, in Santa Barbara, Turkey's Los Angeles Consul General Mehmet Baydar and his deputy Bahadır Demir were shot dead by an elderly Armenian immigrant named Gourgen (Karakin) Yanikian. Yanikian's advice to "kill the Turkish representatives and keep the Armenian question on the agenda everywhere"<sup>28</sup> was quickly implemented. Various Armenian armed terrorist organizations were established to spread terrorism. There are two terrorist organizations whose names are most frequently encountered in attacks against Turkish diplomats in Italy: The ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) and JCAG (Justice Commandos Against Armenian Genocide). The aim of both organizations is to introduce Turkey as a "genocider" through terrorist acts, to provide support in the world public opinion, and finally to unite eastern and western Armenia to establish a great Armenia. To achieve this goal, they carried out bloody terrorist attacks in Italy as well as in different countries of the world.

Taha Carım, who served as Turkey's Ambassador to the Vatican, was shot in the back by an Armenian terrorist while opening the entrance door of the building where he was residing in Rome on June 9, 1977. It is unthinkable that a terrorist act that took place in Italy, which is suffering from terrorism, would not attract attention and not be reported in the press. However, we found that the Italian newspapers we examined saw the assassination of Taha Carım as an ordinary event and did not dwell on it much after reporting the attack. In order to pay homage to the victim of the attack in their country's capital, news about the developments and the funeral is expected, at least until the ambassador's body is sent to his country.

---

<sup>24</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, August 25, 1931.

<sup>25</sup> *Yeni Gün*, August 26, 1931.

<sup>26</sup> *Son Posta*, August 26, 1931.

<sup>27</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, August 27, 1931.

<sup>28</sup> Adem Uzun, "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Ermeni Terörizmi: "Asala Terörü'nden PKK Terörü'ne", *Türk Yurdu*, 28/248 (April 2008), 54.



---

## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

---

However, it is not possible to see the care shown by the Vatican state and the Italian politicians in the Carim assassination in the Italian press.

The Italian press started to give the first news about the assassination on 10 June. It is seen that some newspapers refer to the events of 1915 in the news where information close to each other is given and photographs are used. After writing that the assassination was carried out by an Armenian, La Stampa reported that the ambassador was shot in the head and shoulder with two bullets fired from a 9-caliber pistol by a foreigner who managed to escape immediately after the attack. The newspaper, which is of the opinion that the cause of the attack is unknown, described the murder as follows:

*“Ambassador was opening the door with the key he had inserted in the entrance door of his residence. A tall youth wearing a dark suit with sunglasses approached quickly and fired two shots. The assassin was escaping through the second entrance of the garden as Taha Carim collapsed to the ground begging for help. Upon the cries of the diplomat, the driver and the doorman of the building rushed to his aid and put the injured person’s head on a pillow. About twenty minutes later, he was transported by ambulance to Umberto Hospital, where the long and delicate intervention took place. Meanwhile, the director of the Umberto Improta Regional Police Station had arrived at the scene of the attack. Elio Grappasonni, 51, the ambassador’s driver, said that when they arrived at the ambassador’s residence, he noticed the young man waiting at the nearby bus stop. Then the diplomat got out of the car and that young man walked towards the entrance of the building as the driver began manoeuvring to park the car. Actually, the car used is an embassy official car, but today it was in repair and the ambassador used his own car. Despite this, the attacker, who knew him well, recognized Carim even though he was not an official vehicle, approached him quickly, almost running, and fired. Carim has been the Vatican Ambassador of Turkey since 1973. The only trace appears to be a threatening letter the ambassador received in March. In the letter sent by a secret organization of Armenians living in Turkey, it was stated that if the Turkish government did not release the Armenian political prisoners within two months, an attack would be carried out against a Turkish person residing in Italy. Therefore, until recently, Carim was regularly accompanied by police officers. However, those conducting the investigation do not rule out other possibilities. Other possibilities include Kurds, Armenians, and even Greek Cypriots.”<sup>29</sup>*

Il Tempo, who gave the assassination as an example of an increase in political violence of all kinds, used a meaningful title: “Two bullets and six hours of agony.” The newspaper wrote that the Turkish diplomat was killed by an organization called “Defender of the

---

<sup>29</sup> La Stampa, June 10, 1977.



## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

Oppressed Armenians.” The driver Elio Grappasonni described the assassination to the aforementioned newspaper as follows:

*“I brought the ambassador home using his private Peugeot car with diplomatic plates. The embassy car was under repair. I stood in front of the door to the garden that surrounded the house and asked if there were any afternoon instructions. He replied to me, ‘Thank you Elio, I will go to my American friend alone this afternoon.’ The ambassador got out of the car, started walking towards the entrance door, and entered through the door. He crossed the short garden and, holding the bag with his gun, which he had been carrying for a while, in his left hand, took out the key to open the door. I had closed the left door of the car, and as I was closing the right door, I saw a young man enter through the door and fired two shots, then turned the corner of the house and fled. The ambassador said, ‘Help me, help me, I’m bleeding’ as I ran towards him, and then he collapsed to the ground. I started screaming, the doorman came. We immediately called 113 and called an ambulance. Then we put a pillow under the ambassador’s head to stop the gushing blood. An ambulance arrived a few minutes later.”<sup>30</sup>*

The newspaper wrote that it was almost certain that the assassination was carried out by the Armenians, despite taking into account every possibility. Repeating that Carim had no enemies, *Il Tempo* added: “But he had an enemy: an Armenian terrorist.”<sup>31</sup>

*Paese Sera*<sup>32</sup> and *Gazetta del Popolo* also covered the assassination as we reported. *Gazetta del Popolo* added that the attack was claimed by a secret Armenian organization in Beirut.<sup>33</sup> The Communist Party’s media organ, *L’Unita*, repeated the information that Carim was hit by bullets fired from a distance of no more than 30 centimeters, fell to the ground after being shot in the chin and chest, and that the assassin managed to escape and lose his track.<sup>34</sup> *Il Sole 24 Ore* gave a small news story on its first page with the headline “Turkey’s Vatican Ambassador Killed in Rome” without comment.<sup>35</sup> The Italian newspaper *Il Messaggero* gave the assassination of Taha Carim in the most dramatic way. A photograph in the newspaper is enough to show the gravity of the incident. In the photo taken right after the assassination, the doorman slightly lifted the ambassador who was lying on the ground, as if posing while waiting for an ambulance. In the photo, the ambassador is lying on his side, glasses in his eyes, the police and other unrelated people around. They act as if everything is

---

<sup>30</sup> *Il Tempo*, June 10, 1977; *Archive of the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Rome (AERTR)*, File (F.) 123 (Press: 1960-1979)

<sup>31</sup> *Il Tempo*, June 10, 1977; *Archive of the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Rome (AERTR)*, File (F.) 123 (Press: 1960-1979)

<sup>32</sup> *Paese Sera*, June 10, 1977.

<sup>33</sup> *Gazetta del Popolo*, June 10, 1977.

<sup>34</sup> *L’Unita*, June 10, 1977; *AERTR*, (F. 123 (Press: 1960-1979)

<sup>35</sup> *Il Sole 24 Ore*, June 10, 1977.



## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

normal.<sup>36</sup> L'Osservatore Romano, the organ of the Papacy, announced the murder of Carim as follows: *"The act of violence cost the life of an innocent with a cowardly and treacherous attack. This action is never acceptable in terms of morality, humanity, personal rights and ideology... We sincerely join in the mourning of the relatives of the esteemed diplomat, who are saddened by his death."*<sup>37</sup>

In the 1970s, Armenians, on the one hand, killed innocent people in the name of "revenge" with terrorist acts, on the other hand, they tried to create a conscious victimization. Admittedly, they were successful in their efforts. In fact, the public opinion of many countries of the world was ready to accept the events that took place a hundred years ago and were told unilaterally, as the Armenians narrated. That's why they camouflaged terrorism, knowingly or unknowingly, by making publications to justify the murder of Turkish diplomats. While the news of the assassination of Turkish diplomats in any country was announced, two messages were hidden in the news that "Turks massacred Armenians and Armenian fighters/guerrillas, or terrorists assassinated Turkish diplomats to avenge this." The first and most important was the falsification of "the Turks massacred the Armenians", and for many countries this was not a matter of debate but a definite fact. The killing or injury of innocent Turkish diplomats was trivialized in the shadow of this expression. It is possible to see this scene in Italy as well. It was the newspapers that put a comment in the Italian press that "one and a half million Armenians were massacred in the Ottoman Empire in 1915," along with the news of assassinations such as *Gazetta del Popolo*<sup>38</sup> and *La Voce Repubblicana*.<sup>39</sup> It is also possible to come across those who make lengthy comments such as *Il Tempo*<sup>40</sup> and *Paese Sera*<sup>41</sup> that can excuse the assassination, and those who publish maps of Armenia, including a part of Turkey.

### **2.2. Investigations**

The Italian Police started a feverish work across the country, as the Armenians claimed responsibility for the other attacks of the Armenians. As *Gazetta del Popolo* wrote, while the police were looking for the murderer of the ambassador among the Armenians<sup>42</sup>, some Armenians were detained and arrested. Robot photos of the killer were distributed. Precautions were taken at the border, and the border gates were warned to be careful in case the assassin might leave the country.<sup>43</sup> The Prosecutor Giovanni Di Matteo, who led the

---

<sup>36</sup> *Il Messaggero*, June 10, 1977.

<sup>37</sup> *Archive of the Vatican Embassy of the Republic of Turkey (AVERT)*, Taha Carim, Document (D) 2; *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 10-11, 1977.

<sup>38</sup> *Gazetta del Popolo*, June 10, 1977.

<sup>39</sup> *La Voce Repubblicana*, June 10, 1977.

<sup>40</sup> *Il Tempo*, June 10, 1977.

<sup>41</sup> *Paese Sera*, June 10, 1977.

<sup>42</sup> *Gazetta del Popolo*, June 11, 1977.

<sup>43</sup> *Gazetta del Popolo*, June 11, 1977; *Milliyet*, June 15, 1977.



## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

investigation, instructed Deputy Prosecutor Santacroce and the Head of the Political Department, Improta, to personally follow up on the investigations. According to investigators, it was possible that the man seen shooting Carim did not act alone. Indeed, some witnesses said they saw the killer fleeing with another man, after exiting through a back door onto Monteverdi Street.<sup>44</sup>

Italian newspapers on June 12 announced that Italian police had found a 9-caliber pistol manufactured in a foreign factory in the toilet of a bar near the place where the murder was committed. According to investigators, the pistol was the weapon used in the assassination of Taha Carim.<sup>45</sup> A few days later, the Italian police declared that this pistol, which was found, was a Turkish product made by Kırkkale MKE.<sup>46</sup> Turkish security units determined that this information was false. Two police chiefs from Turkey were sent to Italy to assist the Italian police and get first-hand information. They worked with the Italian police between 17 and 21 June 1977. One of them, Mustafa Yiğit, stated in the report he sent to Ankara on 20 June that “the gun is not a Turkish pistol from Kırkkale factory, as claimed by the Italian police... It is a Hungarian-made Wallam 9 mm calibre pistol.”<sup>47</sup>

Despite this cooperation, no clue could be obtained to shed light on the murder. The following year, the Rome Prosecutor’s Office announced that the case was closed. This statement was met with astonishment and some anger in Turkey. The news appeared in the Turkish newspapers of June 30, 1978<sup>48</sup>, that the Italian authorities closed the Carim assassination case, and some journalists wrote articles criticizing the decision.<sup>49</sup> The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent an instruction to the Roman Ambassador asking him to convey to the relevant Italian authorities that “the closing of the file cannot be accepted by us”. Responding to the embassy’s initiative in this direction two months later, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported the result of their investigation as follows: “*The prosecution file regarding the murder of Ambassador Carim could not be closed. Closing is not possible. However, currently available evidence is insufficient. For this reason, the Italian judicial authorities have the opportunity to conduct an actual study on the subject. If new elements emerge, the investigation will continue with great care. Turkey should be sure of this.*”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> AERTR, F. 123, (Press: 1960-1979); *L’Unita*, June 10, 1977; *Gazetta del Popolo*, June 10, 1977.

<sup>45</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, June 12, 1977; *L’Unita*, June 12, 1977; AERTR, F. 123, (Press: 1960-1979); *Hürriyet*, June 13, 1977; *Tercüman*, June 13, 1977.

<sup>46</sup> *Hürriyet*, June 17, 1977; *Milliyet*, June 17, 1977; *Cumhuriyet*, June 17, 1977; *Tercüman*, June 17, 1977; *Son Havadis*, June 17, 1977.

<sup>47</sup> Bilâl N. Şimşir, *Şehit Diplomatlarımız (1973-1994)* 1 (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2000), 238-239.

<sup>48</sup> *Hürriyet*, June 30, 1978; *Tercüman*, June 30, 1978.

<sup>49</sup> Murat Sertoğlu, “Kapanan Dosya,” *Dünya*, July 3, 1978; Şimşir, *Şehit Diplomatlarımız*, 240-241.

<sup>50</sup> Şimşir, *Şehit Diplomatlarımız*, 240-241.



No “new elements” emerged that would illuminate the Carim assassination, which the Italian authorities meant. But this neglect led to events that upset the Italians. Two Italian citizens were killed and 14 injured as a result of the detonation of the bomb that Armenian terrorists put in the Turkish Airlines office in Rome on the evening of March 10, 1980.

### **3. Assassination of Vecdi Türel**

#### **3.1. Assassination**

Armenian terrorists attacked the Vatican Ambassador of Turkey, Vecdi Türel, on Thursday, April 17, 1980, on his way to the embassy from his home. Türel was born on 1 July 1917 in Istanbul. He graduated from Galatasaray High School and Geneva Law School. He entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1946. He served at various levels of the Ministry. He was appointed to the Vatican Embassy in 1978. Türel accompanied Pope Jean Paul II during his official visit to Turkey in November 1979.<sup>51</sup>

The information given by the American secret service to the Turkish intelligence that a group of Armenians came to Rome from Iran<sup>52</sup> was soon confirmed by the attack on Vecdi Türel. Turkey’s Ambassador to Rome Ali Binkaya reported that Vecdi Türel was injured as a result of an assassination by Armenians, in a telegram he sent to Ankara at 10:15 on April 17, 1980. In the report he sent to the ministry about the attack, Vatican Embassy Undersecretary Yetkin Adayılmaz wrote:

*“Ambassador Vecdi Türel was attacked in his office car at the exit point to the main boulevard, 70-80 meters away from the residence. The terrorists, who are estimated to be three people, caught the office car in crossfire from the right, left and rear. Our ambassador immediately threw himself on the floor of the car, thus avoiding absolute death. He was hit by two bullets and his wounds were not fatal. A single bullet entered the right cheek of the security officer Tahsin Güvenç, who was in the office car and sitting to the right of the driver and remained in the cheek below the ear. Veysel Çakmak, the other security officer sitting to the left of the ambassador in the back, and the official driver survived the incident unscathed. The guards jumped out of the right front and left rear doors and engaged in an armed conflict with the terrorists. The security guard Tahsin Güvenç, who ran after one of the terrorists and fired a few shots, fell to the ground 10-15 meters away due to the effect of his wound, and the terrorist turned the corner and disappeared. The other security officer, Veysel Çakmak, continued to hold on to the other two terrorists and injured one of them. The weapon dropped*

---

<sup>51</sup> Bilâl N. Şimşir, *Şehit Diplomatlarımız (1973-1994)*, 2 (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2000), 909-910.

<sup>52</sup> From the interview we had with Prof. Dr. Kenan Gürsoy on 27 June 2013 in Rome, The Vatican Ambassador of Turkey between 2009-2014.



*by the terrorists was handed over to the police. The Italian police authorities immediately seized the incident and started an investigation.*"<sup>53</sup>

According to the report dated April 21, 1980, prepared by the Rome Police, the assassination was carried out as follows:

*"The Vatican Ambassador of Turkey departed from the address Via Lovanio 24, where he resides, at around 9.25 am on 17 April. The vehicle stopped at the intersection of Via Lovanio and Viale Liegi due to traffic. Meanwhile, the two young men, possibly assisted by a third accomplice, fired a gun repeatedly at the vehicle with the diplomatic license plate. In addition to Türel, there were driver Ennio Grappasonni, and the ambassador's security guards Tahsin Güvenç and Veysel Çakmak in the car. Both security officers, one of whom was injured, immediately counter-attacked and got out of the car and started following the attackers. Meanwhile, Güvenç, who was following the attackers fleeing from Via Lovanio and Via Yser, fell to the ground, while Çakmak fired two shots at one of the attackers. The gun dropped by the attacker, who was probably injured in his right arm, was later found."*<sup>54</sup>

### **3.2. Assassination in Italian Public opinion**

The assassination of Vecdi Türel is the second attack by Armenian terrorists against Turkish diplomats in Italy. This assassination had less coverage in the Italian press than the first one, Carim. The biggest factor in this should be that the ambassador survived the attack with injuries. However, the attack on an ambassador in the Italian capital is of course newsworthy and Italian newspapers covered the assassination. In order to preserve the standards of fairness, we must state that the Italian press published more objectively than the Carim assassination and at least did not interpret the past events unilaterally.

The newspaper Corriere della Sera, in its news titled "Armenian terrorist commandos wounded Turkey's ambassador to the Vatican with two bullets"<sup>55</sup>, reflected the assassination as we described earlier. Il Messaggero's news titled "Turkish Ambassador and his civilian bodyguard injured by Armenians" also included a photograph of the injured ambassador. The assassination was given as short news like in other newspapers, but from the first page.<sup>56</sup> The news, written by Raffaello Sassano and published in Gazzetta del Popolo, included photos of the ambassador and the injured security guard. In this article, which is the most extensive news in the Italian press, he described the occurrence of the assassination as follows:

*"The assassination occurred at 09:30 yesterday morning. The commandos of three or four with their faces uncovered waited in the traffic jam-packed street for the ambassador, the large office car carrying the driver and two special guards. Many bullets went through the*

---

<sup>53</sup> Şimşir, *Şehit Diplomatlarımız* 2, 911-912.

<sup>54</sup> *AVERT*, Vecdi Türel, D. 8, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, April 18, 1980.

<sup>56</sup> *Il Messaggero*, April 18, 1980.



## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

*windows of the car. One of the guards, who was hit by a bullet in his face, threw himself out of the car with a pistol in hand and returned fire. It was a coincidence that there were no more victims from stray bullets. A stray bullet entered through the window of a building in Viale Liegi. Two old ladies who were in the house avoided being the target of bullets because they were in another room. The Ambassador was brought to University Hospital in a bullet-riddled Buick. The condition of the ambassador, who was injured in the right shoulder and chest, is not serious. On the contrary, the situation of his bodyguard, who was shot in the jaw, is serious. Ambassador Türel lived for several months in the same house where his successor, who was killed by a terrorist, lived on Paisiello Street. A year ago, it moved to the penthouse of building 24 on Lovanio Avenue. Every morning at about nine o'clock he drove to work with his driver in front of the building. Two guards would go up to the top floor and come to the car with the diplomat. But the measures were not enough to prevent the Armenian terrorists from taking action.”<sup>57</sup>*

Announcing the assassination on its first page, *Il Popolo* preferred the headline “A political assassination in Rome yesterday morning”. The newspaper, which also published the photograph of the wounded Ambassador, summarized the assassination as it is known, and also touched on some details.

*“Apparently, they were two men with guns. They got out of a car whose type has not yet been determined and quickly approached the ambassador’s car, one on one side and the other on the other. They fired very quickly, almost without hesitation. The bullets shot the 30-year-old bodyguard of the ambassador, Tahsin Güvenç, in the jaw. Although injured, the man realized what had happened and tried to save the diplomat by pushing him under the car. However, two bullets had already penetrated the hood, reaching Türel’s arm and left shoulder. Immediately after the armed attack, Güvenç and the other bodyguard pursued the two attackers and opened fire. However, the injured bodyguard could not stand at one point and collapsed to the ground. He was rescued by some by-passers and taken to the hospital. It was a good coincidence that the bullets fired by criminal attackers did not harm by-passers. A bullet hit the shutters of a first-floor window across the street from where the attack took place.”<sup>58</sup>*

*L’Unita* newspaper announced the assassination as a short news on its first page: “Armenian Attack in Rome: Ambassador and driver were injured. Yesterday morning, in Viale Liegi in Parioli, two-man commandos opened fire as the diplomat’s car was passing, injuring Ambassador Türel and his bodyguard. The latter, although seriously injured, chased

---

<sup>57</sup> *Gazetta del Popolo*, April 18, 1980.

<sup>58</sup> *Il Popolo*, April 18, 1980.



## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

attackers among the people. There were gunshots and perhaps one of the terrorists was shot.”<sup>59</sup>

As can be seen in the examples we gave, this time the Italian newspapers reflected the assassination more objectively. As in the murder of Taha Carım, they avoided making a publication that excused the assassination. In fact, as a country suffering from terrorism, Italy could not be expected to behave otherwise. Pope Jean Paul II condemned the assassination of Türel in his Sunday speech addressing the public in Saint Pierre Square on Sunday, April 20, 1980. Expressing his sadness at the assassination, the Pope said: “*I thank God that the assassination did not have more serious consequences. While I reiterate my sincere wishes for a recovery to the Honourable Ambassador and the injured officer, I would also like to reiterate that I condemn the unfair methods that cause anger in all honourable consciences.*”<sup>60</sup>

Despite these positive and constructive approaches, it should not be ignored that the attackers were not caught this time. Immediately after the assassination, an unknown person phoned the Reuter Agency’s Beirut office and reported that they claimed responsibility for the attack on behalf of the “Armenian Genocide Justice Commandos.”<sup>61</sup> On the evening of the assassination and the next day, several house searches were conducted on the possibility that the injured terrorist might be hiding with Armenians residing in Rome. Moreover, on the night of April 18, the police were called and reported that those who injured the Turkish ambassador were hiding in a garage in Piazza Ronchi. There was no positive result from the raid on that place and another garage nearby.<sup>62</sup> In fact, it is unacceptable for terrorists not to be caught. In the centre of Rome, 3-4 men are assassinating the ambassador of a country with weapons in their hands. Moreover, the failure of the Italian police, who came to the scene a few minutes after the incident, was admitted by the Italian authorities. Head of the Italian Political Police, Dr. Andreozzi said: “*We are very sorry to miss the attackers, but we have taken every precaution to apprehend the perpetrators of this bloody incident and have launched a manhunt in Rome.*”<sup>63</sup>

This manhunt did not yield any results and this assassination took its place among the unsolved events.

### 4. Gökberk Ergenekon Assassination

#### 4.1. Assassination

<sup>59</sup> *L’Unita*, April 18, 1980.

<sup>60</sup> *AVERT*, Vecdi Türel, D. 2; *Son Havadis*, April 21, 1980; Şimşir, *Şehit Diplomatlarımız 2*, 915-916.

<sup>61</sup> *AVERT*, Vecdi Türel, D. 6; *Son Havadis*, April 18, 1980.

<sup>62</sup> *AVERT*, Vecdi Türel, B. 6; *Son Havadis*, April 18, 1980.

<sup>63</sup> *Hürriyet*, April 18, 1980.



## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

On Sunday, October 25, 1981, in the centre of Rome, this time the target of the bullets of an Armenian terrorist was the diplomat, the Second Secretary of the Turkish Embassy in Rome, Gökberk Ergenekon. Ergenekon was born on March 20, 1953, in Ankara. He graduated from Ankara University, Faculty of Political Sciences in 1976 and entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the same year. As his first assignment abroad, he was appointed as the Second Secretary of the Roman Embassy on September 28, 1979.<sup>64</sup> In 1983, he resigned from his position at the State Department, where he had “happily worked” in his own words, and entered politics.<sup>65</sup> In the 1991 elections, he was elected as a deputy from Antalya in the True Path Party and served as the Minister of State in the government established by Süleyman Demirel (November 1991-June 1993).

Gökberk Ergenekon told us about the assassination he was subjected to in Rome:

*“The assassination was on Sunday. On Sundays, I usually stop by the embassy for a few hours so that I can arrange work for the next day. I left my house at San Giovanni in Laterano. Because of the possibility of the Armenians plotting an assassination on me, I got into the habit of looking around first when I left the house. There did not appear to be any troublesome situation. I arrived at Via dei Normanni, where I parked my car. I preferred there because I thought it was the most difficult place for a possible attack. I got in the car and sat down, looking in the rear-view mirror. In the mirror, I saw a man with a messy beard. A white bag he was holding with both hands caught my attention. I thought it was unintentional. If he is carrying something heavy, a plastic bag will not carry it. He comes towards me with quick steps, getting between the two cars. He fired three shots at that time, without taking the gun out of the bag. Tactically they shoot that way. They tighten it like this so that the hives stay in the bag and no evidence is left. One of the three bullets he fired came to my right arm, and the other to my left elbow for raising my arm. A bullet landed on my left wrist as I threw the head back. Then he started running. I was after him and started shooting. He crossed the opposite sidewalk and climbed the steps of the park ahead. I shot another one, the man fell to the ground. But it was raining lightly, and the ground was wet so I couldn’t be sure. Then he got up and started running again. I came back to the restaurant under my house. People we already know. They heard the noise. I had not seen my scars before. Gun in hand, I sat down. I told the restaurant owners to call the police, they said ‘we called’. 3-5 minutes later, two police cars came from separate directions, almost colliding. The police from the terror team kissed me to show their joy that I was saved. I briefly told the case. They took my empty casings. Then they took me to the San Giovanni Laterano Hospital. I called the*

---

<sup>64</sup> Prime Ministry Republic Archive, 30-11-1-0-558-8-17-11.

<sup>65</sup> We had two face-to-face meetings with Mr. Gökberk Ergenekon at his home in Ankara, the first on 10 December 2019 and the other on 13 December 2021. I thank the Minister for his interest and support.



## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

---

*embassy with a phone I found at the hospital and told the incident and said that I was in the hospital.”<sup>66</sup>*

The Italian newspaper Paese Sera reflects the attack on Ergenekon in the most detailed way. The assassination was announced in detail in an article written by Emilio Radice. The headline: “Yesterday, a diplomat from the Turkish Embassy was assassinated. He was injured, he returned fire”. The newspaper, which also included a photograph of Ergenekon taken on a stretcher in the hospital, reported the assassination as follows:

*“Yesterday afternoon, near the Colosseum, an assassination took place against a diplomat from the Turkish Embassy. A young man, whose identity is unknown, fired several shots at Gökberk Ergenekon, who was born 28 years ago in Ankara but has been residing in our city, Laterano, at number 24, San Giovanni, for three years. Assassination is claimed by ASALA. The diplomat, who was wounded in his arms by a pair of bullets, then managed to respond with his .38 gun. The attacker fled by running down the side streets. He is likely to be injured and the police are monitoring all hospitals and outpatient clinics he may go to for treatment. However, those who took responsibility for the assassination added that “the commando has returned to the base”. Ergenekon underwent surgery at San Giovanni Hospital and a bullet was removed. The assassin had precise information. Perhaps he had identified his victim by monitoring the comings and goings of the diplomat at the Turkish Embassy. A little after 4:00 p.m., completely unaware of what awaited him, the diplomat left the house and headed straight for his car, which he had parked on Normanni Street. Ergenekon opened his car door and sat behind the wheel. He didn’t have time to start the engine as a man in his thirties, dressed in windbreakers and jeans, with dark hair and a thick beard, approached him. The attacker drew his gun and fired three rounds at the diplomat. One bullet hit the victim’s left wrist, another hit his right arm, the third completely missed the target and lodged in the floor. Ergenekon did not give the assassin time to open fire and he owes his salvation to this. Like almost all Turkish diplomats, who have long been the target of Armenian and Kurdish separatists, he carried a special 38 pistol on his belt. The diplomat, with remarkable logic and spirit, managed to use it, and this time he opened fire. Completely stunned by this reaction, the shooter turned around and ran frantically amid the hum of the bullets fired at him. He staggered for a moment, possibly wounded by a bullet, but then managed to escape. The diplomat was taken to San Giovanni Hospital by a car from the Celio police station a few minutes later. Here he was operated on by Professor Pisano and was subsequently hospitalized. Talking to journalists, he said: “It is almost certain that the attacker was an Armenian.”<sup>67</sup>*

---

<sup>66</sup> From interviews with Mr. Gökberk Ergenekon on 10 December 2019 and 13 December 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Paese Sera, October 26, 1981.



Other Italian newspapers also published various news about the event. Details about the assassination news, which were mostly given on the first page, were given on the inside pages. There are some details in the news where the same information is repeated and the picture of Ergenekon injured in the hospital is used. La Stampa, while telling the events in an impressive language, also gave some different information. Reiterating that the attack was claimed by ASALA, the newspaper said that the unknown person who read a statement said, “We will continue. We will follow all Turkish fascist diplomats in the world. Victory is ours,” he added. La Stampa claimed that Ergenekon collapsed to the ground after the conflict and some by-passers rescued him and took him to the hospital. The main claim of the Italian newspaper, “Diplomat has been in Rome since 79. He doesn’t seem to have the qualifications Second Secretary.”<sup>68</sup> Il Popolo newspaper also claimed that the “24 September Group” affiliated with ASALA claimed responsibility for the assassination of Ergenekon and accused the injured Turkish diplomat of being a member of the secret Turkish service. Il Popolo recorded that a man who called the media said in the press release: “At four o’clock in the afternoon, on the orders of September 24, our organization attacked the headquarters of the Turkish fascist regime in Rome. Fierce clashes broke out between the revolutionaries and the guards of the Turkish headquarters, and as a result, a Turkish diplomat affiliated with the Turkish fascist intelligence service MIT was shot. The group returned safely to base.”<sup>69</sup> While repeating what is known, L’Unita newspaper asked a critical question: “Who rescued the injured attacker after the attack on the Turkish diplomat?”<sup>70</sup>

#### **4.2. Investigation and Confrontation**

After the assassination, the Italian police launched an intense but again unsuccessful attempt. There was no result either. However, the Armenians were also disturbed by such efforts and threatened the Italian state. According to the news of La Stampa newspaper, ASALA, in its press release in Beirut, warned the Italian government not to “continue the hostile policy towards the interests of the Armenian people.”<sup>71</sup> However, during this period, there were events in many European countries that caused discomfort from the Armenians. In November, ASALA’s heroin warehouse was discovered in Denmark.<sup>72</sup> French police launched several operations against Armenian organizations that smuggle heroin.<sup>73</sup> On 11 November 1981, Lebanese national Dimitriu Giorgiu was caught at Orly airport with a fake passport issued from the Greek Cypriot side. The finding of a scar on the arm of the captured Armenian terrorist caused attention to be drawn to him. Upon the arrest of its leader, Dimitriu

---

<sup>68</sup> *La Stampa*, October 26, 1981.

<sup>69</sup> *Il Popolo*, October 27, 1981.

<sup>70</sup> *L’Unita*, October 27, 1981.

<sup>71</sup> *La Stampa*, October 30, 1981.

<sup>72</sup> *Tercüman*, November 8, 1981.

<sup>73</sup> *Hürriyet*, November 13, 1981.



## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

---

Giorgiu, ASALA threatened France with attacking French diplomats if it did not release the captured terrorist. This threat was effective and the French police, on the orders of the very top<sup>74</sup>, took the terrorist to the airport to release him. However, the Creteil district prosecutor ordered the arrest of Dimitriu Giorgiu for “carrying a false passport.” Investigations began to be made on whether Dimitriu Giorgiu was the terrorist who attacked Ergenekon on October 25 and was injured due to the wound on his arm, and whether he went to Rome in the last month.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, the French Police announced that this terrorist caught in Orly may be the person who wanted to kill Ergenekon in Rome.<sup>76</sup>

During the meeting between Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Spadoloni and French President François Mitterrand in Paris on 19 November, Dimitriu Giorgiu was also on the agenda. It was discussed that he should be extradited to Italy with the possibility that he may have been involved in the assassination attempt against Ergenekon.<sup>77</sup> It was decided to confront the terrorist Dimitriu Giorgiu and Gökberk Ergenekon. Ergenekon went to Paris on 19 November 1981 for this confrontation, and on 20 November the confrontation was held in Paris’s Fresnes Prison. Mr. Gökberk Ergenekon told us the following about this confrontation: “We went to France. Italian prosecutor with us, we went to the prison. They put five men and confronted them. The guys are bearded, I’ve already seen a few seconds. They asked which one. None of them look like the terrorist who shot me.”<sup>78</sup>

France, threatened by ASALA, began to seek a solution to get rid of Dimitriu Giorgiu. The Italians were reluctant to take this “hot potato” Giorgiu into their hands, fearing that it might lead to actions by Armenian militants.<sup>79</sup> France found the solution: deporting the Armenian terrorist from France to Lebanon after a frivolous judgment.<sup>80</sup> The French court that tried Giorgiu sentenced him to 4 months in prison for possession of a fake passport, which was also suspended.<sup>81</sup> Deported from France, alias Dimitri Giorgiu, real name Hachik

---

<sup>74</sup> *Hürriyet* gave the following information about who gave this order: “The number of people who argue that this person is Gaston Defferre, the Minister of Interior, whom we know as the enemy of the Turkish and the patron of the Armenian agitators, is increasing.” *Hürriyet*, November 17, 1981. In our interview, Mr. Ergenekon also drew attention to Gaston Defferre’s closeness with the Armenians and said that the French police had caught this terrorist despite his sympathy for the Armenians. From interviews with Mr. Gökberk Ergenekon on 10 December 2019 and 13 December 2021.

<sup>75</sup> *Hürriyet*, November 15, 1981; *Cumhuriyet*, November 15, 1981; *Milliyet*, November 16, 1981.

<sup>76</sup> *Milliyet*, November 16, 1981.

<sup>77</sup> *La Stampa*, November 20, 1981.

<sup>78</sup> From interviews with Mr. Gökberk Ergenekon on 10 December 2019 and 13 December 2021.

<sup>79</sup> *La Stampa*, November 21, 1981. *L’Espresso*, one of Italy’s important news magazines, wrote that a “peace agreement” was signed between the Italian secret services and Armenian terrorists during this period. *Hürriyet*, November 17, 1981.

<sup>80</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, November 23, 1981; *Milliyet*, November 23, 1981.

<sup>81</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, December 9, 1981; *Milliyet*, December 9, 1981.



## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

Avedisyan, was sent to Beirut on 9 December. The terrorist, who was sent to Beirut and whose name was announced as Haçik Avedisyan, attended a press conference held here with his face masked and it was announced that his real name was Monte Melkonian.<sup>82</sup> The terrorist named Monte Melkonian is one of the important leaders of ASALA. Continuing his actions against the Turks in the following years, Melkonian commanded the Armenian forces in the Karabakh War in the 1990s. He was killed in a clash with Azerbaijani forces on June 12, 1993.<sup>83</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Sait Halim Pasha, one of the two grand viziers among Turkish diplomats and statesmen killed by Armenian terrorists, was victimized by a political assassination in Italy. From this point of view, Italy is one of the two countries with the highest level of martyrs. Despite its pro-Armenian stance, the Italian public opinion was neutral towards the assassination of Sait Halim Pasha. Despite the reference to the events during the war, it was clearly stated that the assassination was a political murder, that it was carried out by a foreigner and that this foreigner was Armenian.

It is very easy to see that this balanced approach changed in favour of the Armenians in the 1970s. Although it is one of the countries with the most intense terrorist attacks in Europe, the Italian public opinion approached the assassination of Taha Carım with prejudice and bias. Although the newspapers of the period announced the news of the assassination, some of them followed a publishing policy that justified the murder as if it were done for revenge. Sait Halim Pasha can never be an excuse for a terrorist attack, but it is clear that he has responsibility as the head of the government that took the deportation decision. However, the fact that the Italian press lost its partially objective approach in the 1970s is a remarkable change. Italian newspapers, following a publication that would mitigate the murder of Taha Carım, who had no other responsibility than representing the Turkish Republic, by showing the Armenians as victims and oppressed, applied double standards. This tolerance towards Armenian terrorism backfired over time, at a time when terrorism was also killed on the street in Italy almost every day. An event took place that partially ended the tolerance towards Armenian terrorism in Italy: The bomb that Armenians planted in the office of Turkish Airlines in Rome was detonated on the evening of March 10, 1980. As a result of the explosion, two Italians were killed, and 14 Italians were injured. After this incident, it is seen that the Italian press took a more neutral and anti-terrorist stance against the assassinations of Vecdi Türel and Gökberk Ergenekon by Armenians in Italy.

---

<sup>82</sup> *Milliyet*, December 11, 1981.

<sup>83</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monte\\_Melkonian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monte_Melkonian) (Access: 07.03.2022)



## **Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

Another striking aspect of the four attacks in Italy is that none of the perpetrators were caught. We have no evidence that the Italian police deliberately did not apprehend the perpetrators. However, it is also clear that there is a security weakness and the failure of the Italian police, even if it is not intentional.



## **Bibliography**

### **1. Archive Documents**

*Archive of the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Rome*

*Archive of the Vatican Embassy of the Republic of Turkey*

### **2. Turkish and Italian periodicals**

*Avanti!*, December 8, 1921.

*Corriere d'Italia*, December 8, 1921.

*Corriere della Sera*, December 8, 1921. June 12, 1977. April 18, 1980.

*Cumhuriyet*, August 25, 27, 1931. June 17, 1977. November 15, 23, 1981; December 9, 1981.

*Gazetta del Popolo*, June 10, 11, 1977. April 18, 1980.

*Hürriyet*, June 13, 17, 1977. April 18, 1980. November 13, 15, 17, 1981.

*Il Giornale d'Italia*, December 8, 1921.

*Il Messaggero*, December 7, 1921. June 10, 1977. April 18, 1980.

*Il Popolo*, April 18, 1980. October 27, 1981

*Il Secolo*, December 7, 1921.

*Il Sole 24 Ore*, June 10, 1977.

*Il Tempo*, June 10, 1977.

*L'Epoca*, December 7, 1921.

*L'Idea Nazionale*, December 8, 1921.

*L'Osservatore Romano*, June 10-11, 1977.

*L'Unita*, June 10, 12, 1977. April 18, 1980. October 27, 1981.

*La Stampa*, December 7, 8, 1921. October 30, 1981; November 20, 1981.

*La Stampa*, June 10, 1977. October 26, 1981.

*La Voce Repubblicana*, June 10, 1977.

*Milliyet*, June 15, 17, 1977. June 30, 1978. November 16, 23, 1981. December 9, 11, 1981.

*Paese Sera*, June 10, 1977. October 26, 1981.



## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

*Son Havadis*, June 17, 1977. April 18, 21, 1980.

*Son Posta*, August 24,26, 1931.

*Tercüman*, June 13, 17, 1977. June 30, 1978. November 8, 1981.

*Yeni Gün*, August 26, 1931.

### 3. Books and Articles

Bogosian Eric, *Operation Nemesis: The Assassination Plot that Avenged the Armenian Genocide*, New York: Little, Brown&Company, 2015.

Bostan, M. Hanefi, “Said Halim Paşa (1864-1921)”, *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 5 (2008), 557-560.

Hyland, Francis P., *Armenian Terrorism: The Past, the Present, the Prospects*, London and Newyork: Routlodge, Taylor&Francis Group, 2021.

İnal, İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal, “Mehmed Said Halim Paşa”, *Son Sadrazamlar IV*, İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1982, 1893-1932.

Nalbandian, Louise, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century*, London: University of California Press, 1975.

Sertoğlu, Murat, “Kapanan Dosya”, *Dünya*, July 3, 1978.

Shiragian, Arshavir, *Condannato a uccidere. Memorie di un patriota armeno*, Milano: Guerini E Associati, 2005.

Shiragian, Arshavir, *The Legacy, Memoirs of an Armenian Patriot*, trans. Sonia Shiragian, Watertown, Massachusets: Hairenik Press, 1976.

Şıracıyan, Arşavir, *Bir Ermeni Teröristin İtirafı*, trans. Kadri Mustafa Orağlı, İstanbul: Kastaş Yayınları, 1997, 2006.

Şimşir, Bilâl N., *Şehit Diplomatlarımız (1973-1994)*, 1-2, Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2000.

Uzun, Adem, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Ermeni Terörizmi: “Asala Terörü’nden PKK Terörü’ne”, *Türk Yurdu*, 28/248 (April 2008), 54-60.

### 4. Interviews

Name-Surname: Kenan Gürsoy

Date of Birth: December 29, 1950

Duty: Vatican Ambassador of Turkey (2009-2014)



---

**Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

Interview Date: 27 June 2013

Name-Surname: Gökberk Ergenekon

Date of Birth: March 20, 1953

Duty: The Second Secretary of the Turkish Embassy in Rome (1979-1982)

Interview Date: December 10, 2019, and December 13, 2021



**Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations** Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

---

**Appendices**

**Appendix-1:** The villa and murder scene where Sait Halim Pasha resided in Rome (16.09.2021).





**Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

**Appendix-2:** Assassination news of Il Messaggero newspaper (07.12.1921).





**Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations** Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

---

**Appendix-3:** The garden where Taha Carım was killed (25.08.2013)





## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

### Appendix-4: Paese Sera (10.06.1977).





**Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022**

---

**Appendix-5:** Via Lovanio, where the assassination of Vecdi Türel took place (27.06.2013).





## Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

### Appendix-6: Il Popolo (18.04.1980).





**Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations** Volume 3 Number 2 June 2022

---

**Appendix-7:** The assassination site where Gökberk Ergenekon parked his car (25.09.2021).



**Appendix-8: Paese Sera (26.10.1981).**

Lunedì 26 ottobre 1981

**PAESE SERA / CRONACA DI ROMA**

**Attentato, ieri, contro un diplomatico dell'ambasciata turca**

**Ferito, ha risposto al fuoco**

L'agguato al Colosseo - Il killer si è avvicinato all'auto e ha sparato diversi colpi - Alla reazione è fuggito

**di EMILIO RADICE**

**ATTENTATO** contro un diplomatico dell'ambasciata turca ieri pomeriggio nei pressi del Colosseo. Un giovane sconosciuto ha sparato diversi colpi di pistola contro Gokberk Ergenekon, nato ad Ankara 26 anni fa, ma da tre residente nella nostra città in via San Giovanni in Laterano 24. L'attentato è stato rivendicato a Parigi dall'Esercito segreto armato per la liberazione dell'Armenia. Il diplomatico è stato ferito da un paio di proiettili alle braccia, poi è riuscito ad imporre la sua calibro 38 e a rispondere al fuoco. L'attentatore si è dato alla fuga correndo nei vicoli sotto le colte del Celio. È probabile che sia rimasto a sua volta e la polizia ha eseguito il controllo tutti gli ospedali e gli ambulatori dove potrebbe presentarsi per essere soccorso, anche se chi ha riferito ha aggiunto che il nemando è già rientrato alla casa. Gokberk Ergenekon è operato al San Giovanni e gli è stato estratta una pallottola. Si è detto con-

vino di essere rimasto vittima di un fanatico irredentista armeno.

Un attentato studiato nei minimi particolari ma fallito nella sua esecuzione. Il sicario era in possesso di precise informazioni. Forse aveva individuato la sua vittima osservando l'andirivieni della ventina di funzionari dell'ambasciata turca di via Palestro 26. Poi aveva agguato il suo uomo fino a scoprire l'indirizzo della sua abitazione, in via San Giovanni in Laterano.

Poco dopo le 16, del tutto ignaro di quello che lo aspettava, il giovane diplomatico è uscito di casa e si è diretto verso la sua automobile parcheggiata in via dei Normanni. Gokberk Ergenekon ha aperto lo sportello della vettura si è seduto al volante. Non ha fatto in tempo a mettere in moto che gli si è affiancato un uomo sulla trentina, vestito con una giacca a vento, jeans, capelli scuri e una folta barba. Il killer ha estratto una pistola e ha sparato tre colpi in rapida successione contro il funzionario d'ambasciata. La mira è stata poco precisa. Un proiettile ha preso il polso sinistro della vittima, un altro ha trapassato il braccio destro, poco sotto l'ascella, un terzo ha mancato del tutto il bersaglio e si è conficcato nella fessura.

Gokberk Ergenekon non ha dato tempo all'attentatore di sparare colpi, e a questo deve la sua salvezza. Come quasi tutti i diplomatici turchi, da tempo nel mirino degli irredentisti armeni e curdi, portava alla cintura una grossa calibro 38 special a tamburo. Il diplomatico, con notevole presenza di spirito, è riuscito a impugnare e a sua volta ha aperto il fuoco. Il sicario è stato preso del tutto all'improvviso da questa reazione, ha voltato le spalle e si è messo a correre all'imparata, fra il sibilo dei proiettili sparati gli dietro. Per un istante ha anche barcollato, forse ferito da una pallottola, ma poi è riuscito a dileguarsi.

Il diplomatico è stato soccorso pochi istanti dopo da un au-

to del commissariato Celio e portato al San Giovanni. Qui è stato operato dal professor Pisano e poi ricoverato. Se la caverà con una quindicina di giorni di degenza. Parlando con i giornalisti ha detto: «Quasi sicuramente l'attentatore era un armeno». L'affermazione ha tutte le caratteristiche della credibilità. Non è la prima volta infatti che i militanti delle tante organizzazioni clandestine, che combattono per l'indipendenza dell'Armenia, colpiscono nella nostra città. Nel 1977 cadde freddato con due colpi di pistola, Taha Carim, ambasciatore turco presso la Santa Sede. Poi ci fu un'impressionante escalation di attentati col tritolo (nel marzo dell'80 una bomba deposta davanti all'ufficio turco di piazza della Repubblica causò due morti fra i passanti).

Infine, nell'aprile dell'anno scorso, l'attentato contro Vecdi Turci, nuovo ambasciatore di Ankara presso il Vaticano, succeduto al collega assassinato.

Il diplomatico turco Gokberk Ergenekon in ospedale