CHAPTER 1

THE POLITICS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE 19th CENTURY: INSTITUTIONALIZATION, CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the political dynamics of Ottoman modernization attempts undertaken between the late 18th century and the 20th century. These historical attempts are generally classified in the political literature either as modernization or Westernization. This process was not linear; rather, it fluctuated. This study describes certain military, legal, administrative, social and institutional milestones of these movements. For instance, Selim III's attempts were predominantly military, while from the Tanzimat onwards, the reforms acquired political, legal and administrative tones. This paper also outlines domestic and international developments that systematically affected the modernization measures. Russian wars could be considered the main factor influencing Ottoman statesmen until the end of the 19th century. Conversely, Western powers did not fully support the Ottoman Empire during this period. In return, Ottoman statesmen played one power against another to sustain the empire's diplomatic existence. The paper concludes by evaluating the more recent developments of the 20th century to elucidate the inheritance of the state system of the new-born Turkish Republic.

Keywords: Ottoman modernization, Ottoman history, westernization, Ottoman reforms

Throughout the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottoman Empire was busy with the Central European and Mediterranean frontiers. From the last quarter of the 18th century onwards, Ottoman armies would engage in war mainly at the Russian borders. Excluding the Crimean war (1853-56), under an alliance with Britain, France and Piedmonte, Ottoman armies were heavily defeated by the Russians. Thus, most of the early Ottoman attempts at modernization can be summarized as the military struggle against Russia. From the early 19th century onwards, Ottoman statesmen were aware of the fact that this would not be possible without the support of England and France. This support was at first unofficially inaugurated in military matters. The Sublime Porte had taken into consideration individual demands, and tried to modernize its military organization, weapons, equipment and ammunition. The failure of these early attempts on the war stage caused the Sultan and the statesmen to take harsh measures. Ultimately, when the defeats could not be prevented, finding themselves in a desperate situation, policymakers determined to reform and modernize the whole state mechanism. Necessary legal regulations were made to establish a suitable context for modernization.

Nevertheless, while on the one hand England and France gave military and diplomatic support, on the other they dominated the Ottoman Empire financially, economically and commercially. Furthermore, they openly or secretly (with Russia), supported and encouraged the independence of rebellious non-Muslim minorities of the Balkans. When Sultan Abdulhamid II came to power in 1876, most of the Ottoman territories in Europe had been lost. The major territorial losses in the Middle East would happen after World War I, in 1917.

This chapter aims to give a broad picture of certain aspects of Ottoman modernization. These occurred mainly in the political, social, legal and administrative fields. This chapter will hopefully be beneficial for the readers of the book who are not competent in Ottoman history to acquire a historical perspective of the period.

Early Attempts at Modernization

The Russo-Ottoman war started during Mustafa III's reign (1767), and ended just before his death in 1774, with a heavy defeat and the loss of Crimea. His brother Abdulhamid I also suffered a series of defeats on the Austrian and Russian borders, which caused him to die under much distress (1789). Observing the mismanagement of the state, Mustafa III's son Prince Selim had already spent his youth in a state of anxiety. During the reign of his uncle, he would have liked to take France as a role model for Ottoman modernization efforts. To that end, he communicated with Louis XVI, before his accession to the throne (1786) (Zinkeisen, 2011).

As soon as he acceded to the Ottoman throne, he initiated a modernization process, starting from the army. The annexation of the Crimea in 1783 by Russia was not accepted by the Ottoman authorities. After almost 300 years of Ottoman maritime control throughout the Black Sea, Russia was now at the Northern shores. Furthermore, after the declaration of war on Austria, the Ottomans realized that Russia would also engage in war on Austria's side. Ottoman armies were far from capable to fight on two battlefronts. The Ottoman alliance with Prussia in the course of that war had no military advantage. After the peace Treaty of Zištovi with the Austrians (1791), the war with Russia acquired greater significance. The developments at the battlefronts gave Sultan Selim III enough elements for his future projects.

There was no hope for an Ottoman victory with an untrained and disorderly army. Both civil and military circles acknowledged the army's inability to fight in the war. Moreover, the statesmen feared the possibility of having no truce at all, in case the enemy to become aware of the situation. On the other hand, Ottoman commanders demanded an immediate truce. There was a boycott by the army who was resisting to fight, a situation that had never been experienced before throughout Ottoman history. Sultan Selim III was informed about the joint decision signed by the military and civil authorities. He commented that "they know we have no troops, no power", and signed the truce (August 11, 1791) (Beydilli, 2011; Beydilli, 2013).

Under such circumstances, the Sultan attempted a modernization movement, in every respect. While the army was on its way to Istanbul, he requested reports from prominent statesmen on reformation in the economic, political, military, financial, religious and scientific fields of the Empire (Çağman, 1992).

Soon after the Treaty of Zištovi, there was a short period of peace. The military activities of Selim III gained speed during this period. Compared with his ancestors, long-term reforms were managed and applied to all state institutions for the first time on a wide scale. Selim III believed in substantial and permanent reforms. In this respect, he closely followed the French model (Çağman, 1992). For some time, there had been hints at the necessity of inaugurating Western institutions within the Ottoman Empire. Selim III insisted on it and his efforts met with a strong opposition. The Sultan first changed all the military commanders who joined the Russo-Ottoman war, and assigned others from the outside as the sign of a new era (Beydilli, 2011).[1]

1 For an overall evaluation and social dynamics of the period, see for details (Karpat, 2002, pp. 77-118).

Reports on reforms generally emphasized the necessity for the existing land regime, which was the main source of revenue, to be changed, both for the people and for the state. In this respect, an equitable collection of taxes, together with the modernization of the army, navy, and their military armament technology, the re-organization of pious foundations, the attainment of additional sources of revenues for the state, the development of international trade with native subjects were also among the issues of reformatory reports. The public and the administrative cadres of the Empire were already aware of the mismanagement. Nevertheless, some pressure groups, who benefited from ongoing mismanagement were opposing the reorganization of the state.[2]

From the early years of the state, the lands in which grain was cultivated belonged to the state (except pious foundations). Peasants were granted the right of usufruct and of cultivating those lands for life. This right was also inherited by their sons. In return, tax revenues were allocated to timar holding sipahis (cavalry), on the condition that they would join the expeditions under the flag of the Sultan's army. However, since the beginning of the 17th century (for almost 200 years), because of the military transformation, there were no sipahis in their original form. The crop taxes were collected through the iltizam (tax-farming) system. The timar lands and their positions were being held by others. In time, the tax-farmers had also constituted local notables which could be loosely controlled by the central government.

The ayan had gained their wealth and power through leasing state-owned lands as well as by tax farming. The larger part of such lands ceased to be assigned to timar (fief) holders and were leased by the state to local notables, ayans and aghas, and more than 50% of agricultural lands in the empire were state held leaseholds. Large areas of endowed land, and land assigned to officials and favorites were similarly exploited. The ayan's influence on and close cooperation with local authorities favored them in these leasing operations. Later, in the 18th century, the leases were made for lifetime and priority rights to the leases were granted to the sons of lessees. Iltizam, too, was extended after the dissolution of the old timar system towards the end of the 18th century, and local notables benefited from their involvement in this profitable business (İnalcık, 1995).

The reformatory reports promoted the reformation of the timars. However, this system was far behind the requirements of the contemporary military system. Thus, the idea of a central army gained support. Nevertheless, the local notables, who considered themselves outside of the central government, opposed the idea. They were the immediate opposition group, who

2 Detailed information and the chronological development of events of the era can be followed from a contemporary source: (Ahmed Vasıf Efendi. 1994 and 2017).

resisted the modernization movement. When Selim III was dethroned and killed, and when his nephew Mahmud II acceded to the throne shortly afterwards, he had to sign a document -Sened-i İttifak (The Charter of Alliance)- recognizing the authority of the local notables (ayans), vis-a-vis the Sultan, (i.e. the central government) and limiting the authority of the Sultan. Sultan Mahmud became aware of how sensitive the situation was, then. In time, he would eliminate them one by one to stabilize the central authority.[3]

The political centre of gravity would shift to the Bâb-ı Âli [Sublime Porte] during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II. The Ottoman Empire would pay the political bill of such a preference with the imposition of one of its governors. The governor of Egypt, Kavalalı Mehmed Ali Pasha would remind the court of the military weakening of the Ottoman Empire, with a heavy defeat. However, Sultan Mahmud II had passed away in 1839 just on the eve of the defeat, and when his son accessed the throne, he fully surrendered to the West, and to his statesmen.

Selim III was able to establish a navy, and a modern and well trained (Nizam-ı Cedid/ New Order) army. He could soon inaugurate an independent financial institution and a fund (treasury of Nizâm-ı Cedîd). He released new taxes, and prevented the leakages. The New Order paid utmost importance to increasing savings, tightening the importation of luxurious utilities, increasing state revenues, and the development of trade.[4] In this respect, he promoted the state authorities and the wealthy in order for them to purchase ships and make overseas trade. Non-Muslim Ottoman subjects were also granted the status of "European Merchant", so that they could carry out commercial activities under equal privileges with European entrepreneurs. The contemporary source D'Ohsson reported that as a result of such attempts, a commercial fleet was constituted, composed of 82 ships (Beydilli, 2011).[5]

The main European countries such as England, France, the Netherlands, and Austria were carrying out a considerable amount of their foreign trade through companies. Under the advantages of capitulations, they were paying lower custom tariffs. Thus, they could purchase and convey cheap raw materials from the Ottoman dominions, while exporting expensive luxurious goods, which was a very profitable commercial activity. On the other hand, Ottoman merchants could make little revenues, which were restricted with profit margin regulations. The status of "European Merchant" was granted to overcome that restriction. These kinds of

3 The contemporary political developments during the reign of Sultan Mahmoud were followed by an eminent senior official of the time, Khusrev Pasha (Çelik, 2013; Jorga, 2005, pp 197-200)

4 For a general evaluation and critique of his reforms, also see Zinkeisen's (2011) study on the history of the Empire.

5 For the evolution of Ottoman economic philosophy, and transformatory attempts towards a capitalist market system see Ahmed Güner Sayar's (2000) volume on the Evolution of Economic Thought in the Ottoman Empire.

promotions continued during the reign of Mahmud II, but in the long run, the system would have little success.

The existing School of Naval Engineering had developed. In the Hasköy district in İstanbul, a cannon and tunnel division was established, together with military engineering, to be used as an academy of land forces (1795). A printing house was also established there (1797). Grand military quarters were constructed in the Levent and Üsküdar districts in Istanbul, and also certain locations of Anatolia to sustain the new military organization. These were significant military stages of the modernization movement (Beydilli, 2011).

The difficulty which Selim III faced in the process of modernization was the ongoing struggle between the "new" and the "old". The ancient institutions were not abolished, but they survived at a parallel level, alongside their modern versions. Since he was not able to abolish the Janissaires, who were the backbone of military institutions, in the end, they dethroned Sultan Selim III. Moreover, the New Army (Nizam-ı Cedid), which was established with great efforts, was entirely destroyed. Besides, the new financial and treasury models, together with the long-lasting efforts for a modern army, blew out.

Certain new practices went on. Among these, the presence of permanent ambassadors in the major capitals of Europe is of crucial importance. Their missions can be considered as the bureaucratic mechanism which advocated for the interests of the Ottoman Empire abroad. From 1793 onwards, permanent ambassadors were assigned to London, Paris, Vienna, and Berlin respectively. Although these missions were interrupted for a short period, in the long run, they came to constitute the Ottoman foreign bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, the political developments in France, under the rule of Napoleon, were having an impact on Selim III's attempts. He was disappointed with the occupation of Egypt by the armies of Napoleon in 1798, who was planning to blockade the English trade from the Indian route. The efforts to strengthen the central administration within the countryside had little success. Selim III was trying to contain the power of the local notable families (ayan) of Pazvandoğlu, Tirsiniklioğlu, Tepedelenli, İşkodralı, Canikli, Cezzar, and Kavalalı (Jorga, 2005; Beydilli, 2011).

In the meantime, many officers, technical staff, who remained unemployed after the dissolution of the French dynasty, were recruited with attractive salaries in the Ottoman army, navy, and engineering departments. They came from a wide span of occupations, ranging from ship-construction architects, and engineers, to pool constructors in the Arsenal, military trainers of troops, to cannon casting masters, drillers, carpenters and caulkers. In this regard,

the newly opened Ottoman residential embassies of London (1793), Paris, Vienna and Berlin, (1797) were beneficial. However, the struggle vis-a-vis revolutionary France also spread to the Ottoman territories. With Napoleon's occupation of Italy (October 1797), the Ottoman Empire and France became neighbours in the Adriatic. Soon after Napoleon's attack in Egypt (July 1798), the Ottoman Empire had a military confrontation with France (January 1799). French armies had to evacuate Egypt in 1802, under the auspices of the English and Russian alliance (Beydilli, 2011).

The recognition of Napoleon as an emperor, which was a long-lasting disputed issue in the diplomatic circles of Europe, costed Selim III his throne, and almost the whole of the modernization movement. The diplomatic tendency towards France meant abandoning the alliance with England and Russia. In 1806 the two states found themselves in a state of conflict. The passing of an English fleet from the Dardanelles without strong resistance and its anchorage in Istanbul was a strike to the political power of Selim III (February 1807). The blockade of the English fleet caused shortage of food in the city, and a peak in prices. Because of the reforms, the accumulated fury of the people became even stronger.

At the end of February, the English fleet withdrew, and the Ottoman army departed for the Russian expedition in April 1807. Köse Musa Pasha, who was against the reforms, and allegedly secretly in agreement with Prince Mustafa, remained deputy Grand Vizier in Istanbul. When the army reached Edirne, all preparations for a coup de etat against the Sultan were completed. Grand Vizier Ibrahim Hilmi Pasha and prominent statesmen accompanied the army. Thus, in all respects, it was an uprising organized by the secondary level of military and administrative cadres. The coup de etat, chiefly organized against the New Order by Köse Musa Pasha and Şeyhülislâm Topal Ataullah Efendi, lasted four days and ended in little bloodshed, and the dethronement of Selim III (25-29 May 1807) (Atâ, 2010; Beydilli, 2011).[6]

Some of Selim III's attempts at becoming involved in European politics had no success. He approached Napoleon because the Russian oppression had brought the relationship with England to a standstill. Enmity with Russia had deep historical roots. The Sublime Porte found itself between the Russo-English alliance and the diplomatic pressure of France. Just at that point, the removal of the Wallachian and Bogdan princes from office by the Ottoman court provoked Russia. Selim III was most probably finally expecting a victory over Russia under the alliance with France (Napoleon). Nevertheless, Napoleon was reluctant to form such an alliance. Ottoman armies had to fight alone. Istanbul was faced with an English blockade,

6 The uprising is known as "Kabakçi Mustafa İsyanı".

and the Ottoman armies went on war with Russia until 1812. To some extent, Napoleon's Moscow expedition in 1812 saved the Ottoman Empire. It should be remembered that in the meantime, Selim III had been dethroned, Mustafa IV had accessed the throne, Selim III had been then murdered with another rebellion, and Mahmud II had acceded to the throne in 1808 (Atâ, 2010).

Russia consented to peace with the Ottoman Empire with the Bucharest Agreement of 1812. Despite the Russian victories over the Ottoman army, Russia signed an agreement with moderate condition because it was aware that its dominions were under the threat of the French army. The Sublime Porte could save the political integrity of the Ottoman Empire only after Napoleon was defeated by the coalition Powers.

Russian Pressure on the Ottoman Empire

Since the end of the 18th century, Russia, now officially recognized as part of Europe, pursued a policy geared towards replacing the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul. The Tsar claimed to be the protector of all Orthodox Christian peoples of the Balkans. Under these new circumstances, being aware of the political and military danger, The Sublime Porte advocated the balance of power in Europe with every diplomatic effort (İnalcık, 2006).

After Napoleon's French threat to the European monarchies, Austrian statesman Clemence von Metternich proposed a new system to sustain peace and order in Europe. According to him, unity could be achieved only through the "co-operation of the states", not through the control of a "dominant state" (İnalcık, 2006). However, the Metternich system of the Vienna Convention in 1815 lacked the actual mechanisms to impose peace and order, or to deter any unjustified aggression, other than the irregular meetings of European leaders. Nevertheless, the following century would end without a major military collision (except the Franco-Prussian war during the unification of Germany) among the major Powers. This power balance strategy was called the "Concert of Europe".

The Ottoman Empire was not represented at the Congress of Vienna. The Ottoman government was deeply concerned about the rebellions of local notables. These local notables were financially and militarily powerful vis-a-vis the central government. They were so efficient that they were able to force Sultan Mahmoud II to sign a document (Sened-i İttifak) guaranteeing their de facto status at his accession to the throne (İnalcık, 2006). However, with the abovementioned political developments, the document lost its legal status within a few months.

Reforms of Mahmoud II

The roots of the Ottoman Empire were already shaken. The Ottoman ruling elite had to bear the attacks of the nationalist movements, as other empires did. Under such circumstances, Sultan Mahmoud II managed to partly clean up the political ruins with passion and energy. His efforts could be considered as the initial steps of the Tanzimat period. During the reign of Mahmoud II, Serbians had taken certain political rights after a series of uprisings (1804-1815). Consequently, encouraged by the Western Powers, the Greek subjects rebelled, which resulted in their independence in the Morean peninsula (1821-1829). The Greek rebellion pushed the Ottoman Empire into a deep political and diplomatic conflict situation with Europe. The joint Russian, British, and French fleets burned down the Ottoman navy, which was anchored at Navarino in 1827. Janissary troops were abolished only a year before. Now the state had no navy, and only an untrained army. The Sublime Porte had no choice but to recognize the legal independent status, demanded by the rebellious militants.

For the first time, the term "Eastern Question" began to circulate in European diplomatic circles. Russian armies attacked, benefiting from the unfavorable conditions (1828).[7] With the Edirne Treaty (1829), concluding the war with Russia, the Ottoman government had to recognize Greek independence (İnalcık, 1941; Zürcher, 1994).[8]

In this period, the revenues of most of the arable lands in the countryside were taken by the local authorities (viceroys and governors). Tax revenues of these great and vast lands were registered in the central treasury. This policy had already begun during the reign of Selim III, under the measures of the New Order (1791). Tax revenues of local cavalry (sipahis), who escaped from the army during the 1787-1792 expedition were removed and registered to the central treasury, as punishment. Approximately between 1600-1800, the tax revenues of those state lands were collected through tax-farming (iltizam). In time, a huge social group of tax-farmers who would exploit the poor peasants had emerged. In 1831, all the timar lands were transformed into state lands. This ended the unique Ottoman traditional land regime which had lasted for centuries. However, most of the state lands were under the control of powerful local groups, while many peasants had no lands. The main reason for the peasant uprisings especially in the Bulgarian territories was the feudal condition and regime. It was crucial for the decrease of Ottoman state authority in the countryside (İnalcık, 1941).

7 Although certain wise statesmen were against war with Russia, the war party dominated the State Council. A scholar and statesman, Izzet Molla had presented a report on the evaluation of diplomatic and military developments to the Sultan. However, he was exiled, and died in exile. (Atâ, 2010, pp 316-345).

8 For an overall evaluation of the Ottoman Empire by an English naval officer, see Sir Adolphus Slade's travels in Turkey (1945) and for battlefronts in this period, and military power of Ottoman army, also see David Urquart's (2014) study on Ottoman military power.

Further military and political developments regarding the Ottoman territories had shaken the initial format of the Concert of Europe. The Egypt events and the hostile attitude of governor Mehmed Ali Pasha pushed the major European states to become involved in Ottoman affairs. When Mehmed Ali Pasha's troops defeated the Ottoman Imperial army and occupied Anatolian territories (1832-33), Sultan Mahmoud II had no choice but to sign an alliance with Russia. At the initial stage of turbulence, England was reluctant to save the Sublime Porte from this desperate situation. English statesmen realized its gravity when a Russian fleet anchored its ships in the Bosphorus. When the threat grew, further Russian infantry was demanded by the Sublime Porte in order to remove Mehmed Ali Pasha's troops from Anatolian territories.

The treaty, signed at Hünkâr İskelesi in 1833 with the Russians, virtually turned the Sultan into a vassal of the Tsar. In the second phase of the Egyptian crisis, observing the different expectations of the major European Powers, England took the initiative to guarantee the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. However, in the meantime, it also gained vast commercial privileges in 1838. Soon, all the great powers (except France) agreed in London (1840) to put pressure on Mehmed Ali Pasha to abandon his plan to establish an Arab Empire. Afterwards, a new era began in the Ottoman Empire, in which England fully supported the Tanzimat reforms. Between 1839-1878, England's influence in the Ottoman Empire increased in all fields (İnalcık, 2006).

Tanzimat reforms were promulgated in 1839, under these diplomatic circumstances. The Sublime Porte realized the necessity of preventing the frequent intervention of foreign powers into Ottoman domestic affairs, causing the distress of the non-Muslim subjects. These interventions mainly originated from occupation aspirations. In the end, as a result of a serious and overwhelming defeat before its own governor of Egypt, the Ottoman sultan had to leave his fate into foreign hands. All possible anxieties were left aside and the Tanzimat Reforms were made public (3 October l839).

The Gülhane Edict was designed on the principle that the legislation which it envisaged be crucial in regenerating the state. The rescript introduced revolutionary ideas and institutions to Ottoman society. Among them was the Sultan's promise, confirmed by an oath, to respect the laws pursuing its principles and the establishment of a council for legislative activities with the guarantee of freedom of debate. When he composed the decree, Reshid Pasha had intended to impose limits on the despotic power of the Sultan. In his letter to Palmerston dated August 12, 1839, he confessed his intention (İnalcık, 1995).

The document was mainly based on the revival of religion, state, country and the nation. Nevertheless, it had the philosophy of a European state. From then onwards, all religious and ethnic classes within the Empire would have equal rights, before the law. This principle would be maintained throughout the Tanzimat period as the backbone of Ottoman governmental policies (İnalcık, 1941).

France believed that equality before the law would lead to the fusion among all ethnic and religious groups, so that a powerful Ottoman state could resist in the East against Russian aspirations. Although the Christian subjects were not confident, and sometimes even showed contempt towards such policies, the Sublime Porte had enough motivation and enthusiasm to realize them. In 1858, a circle of governors emphasized the absolute equality of all Ottoman subjects, and in this regard, during the execution of state affairs, reminded them of their obligations. In 1864, regulations gave non-Muslim subjects poll rights for local Assemblies. In 1869, when the Council of State (Shura-ı Devlet) was established, certain non-Muslims subjects were also elected as members. Christian governors were assigned to Lebanon and Crete (İnalcık, 1941).

However, despite intense desire for administrative reformation, Ottoman intellectuals complained about the oppressive ruling style of the bureaucracy. According to them, the Janissaries were the only power who resisted the malpractices of the absolute power. Then, after the abolition of the Janissaries, people became hopeful for freedom for some time. Nevertheless, when the bureaucratic elite felt safe from control, they established an oppressive administration over the people (Tütengil, 1969). The Tanzimat period reflected the authoritarian rule of the bureaucracy, especially among ordinary people.

Certain conservative intellectuals were also not happy with the artificial imitation of Western institutions. They believed that such an uncontrolled evolution from ancient customs to European life-style would corrupt and cause the decline of the deep-rooted Ottoman social structure. In this respect, the example of Ali Suavi[9], from his experience of the London higher class, is interesting: even some Westerners did not praise the superficial modernization movement among the Ottoman upper class. According to an English family in Istanbul, the Ottoman statesman Fuad Pasha[10] was not an Ottoman man, but on the contrary, a French man (Tütengil, 1969).[11]

9 He was a Western oriented but rebellious Ottoman figure.

10 Ottoman Foreign Minister and Grand Vizier during the reign of Sultan Abdulaziz.

11 For the political activities of the Young Turks, and the atmosphere of the age by an impartial observer please see Mordtman (1999).

Ali Suavi went on analysing the current political situation: most of the diplomatic problems depended on the Russian Tsar, who provoked the Christian subjects within the Ottoman Empire. His main goal was to depreciate the ruling capacity of the Ottoman government. His statement on the legal structure of the country was that, in England, there was only one English law, not a French and Russian law. However, in Istanbul, there existed many laws for different ethnic groups. In the case of a dispute, they would not apply to the Ottoman courts, but to French or English ambassadorial courts. The Sublime Porte should remove these various types of laws. According to him, non-Muslims should trust the Ottoman courts, and they should be proud of being Ottoman subjects (Tütengil, 1969).

The existence of many laws in the Tanzimat period is historically open to question. Although the currency of various laws was a fact, to some extent, it was not because of Ottoman legal and administrative failure, but of diplomatic abuses, and the exploitation of the capitulatory regime by the foreign Powers. Centuries ago, capitulations were granted to certain European states to facilitate their commercial activities throughout the Ottoman dominions (see: Laidlaw, 2010). The capitulations included certain privileges for ambassadors, consulates, and dragomans. As time went on, the foreign powers gradually extended commercial and legal immunities and exploited the rights that were given to them long before. In the case of a legal dispute, the non-Muslim subjects of Greek and Armenian origin could easily claim English and French nationality, and escape Ottoman law. The Sublime Porte was not powerful enough to follow such criminal cases (for details see: Serbestoğlu, 2010).[12]

The Sublime Porte insisted on the ideal of solidarity in the "Ottoman State". Nevertheless, the ongoing great mutiny in Crete, the activities of the Bulgarian and Greek brigands, and the more independent attitude of Serbia were desperate developments. Despite the situation looking hopeless, the papers claimed that the Ministry of Education could contribute to the fusion of diverse peoples within the Empire. In 1868, under the auspices of France, the Mekteb-i Sultani (The Imperial School) was established in Istanbul. All members of the ethnic and religious groups of the Empire could attend this new school. This new school was a fruit of Sultan Abdulaziz's journey to Paris, London, Berlin and Vienna in 1867. He must have been persuaded psychologically to open such a school after experiencing Europe's modern atmosphere.

12 To prevent frequent and illegal change of nationality, the Sublime Porte promulgated a bill to determine who really was an Ottoman subject: "Tabiiyet-i Osmaniye Kanunnamesi", *Düstur*, I. Tertip, vol. 1, Istanbul, 1289/1873, p 16-18.

During the following years, when riots in Bosnia Herzegovina and Bulgaria erupted, the Sublime Porte realized the necessity of shaping the "Ottoman" ideal in a strict form: the constitutional monarchy was adopted in 1876 (İnalcık, 1941; Zürcher, 1994).[13]

Conclusion of the Tanzimat Period

Halil İnalcık summarized the major characteristics of modernization in this early period as follows:

A program of modernization was first adopted by the state as a measure of self-defence against aggressive and imperialistic Europe. The superiority of European military techniques and organization was recognized as early as the end of the 17th century. This perception was a necessary psychological preparation for the later cultural adaptations from the West.

Secondly, systematic modernization started with military reforms in the 18th century, especially under Selim III. From 1830 onwards, the process was extended to the administration and public institutions, a trend which culminated in the proclamation of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876.

Thirdly, throughout the modernization movement the state was the initiator, and changes were imposed from above, with the Sultan using his absolute power to create the bureaucratic machinery necessary to realise changes.

Fourthly, the masses, the great majority of which were living in a closed rural economy, were generally dependent on the ayan, aghas, and clerics, who were vitally interested in keeping them attached to traditional institutions. Even in the period between 1800 and 1850 these groups actively resisted the reforms imposed by the state; the Turkish-Muslim population of the Empire remained generally indifferent, or even refractory in the face of change (İnalcık, 1964, pp. 624-690.

Fifthly, a desire to satisfy non-Muslim subjects and the Western Powers definitely encouraged the Ottoman state to adopt secular laws and institutions. The Western powers were interested in establishing liberal institutions within the empire, which they thought would guarantee at once the integrity of the empire and their own economic interests in it.

Sixthly, around l860 a small group of Turkish patriots with a Western outlook emerged and carried out, in the newly introduced press and in a number of literary periodicals, a vigorous campaign against the Sultan's absolutism. His reform measures were, they believed, both arbitrary and contrary to the real interests of the Turkish-Muslim population (İnalcık, 1995).

13 To follow the developments of the age, also see following Works: (Lewis, 2002; Engelhart, 1999; Findley, 2011).

The Hamidian Era

The Ottoman statesmen's efforts in favour of equality and just treatment vis-a-vis the non-Muslim subjects had little effect. Mutiny in the Balkans continued. Serbia declared war, but it was easily crushed by the Ottoman troops. However, the military defeat of Serbia turned into a diplomatic crisis with Russia. Peace talks to settle the dispute in Istanbul had no result. The hostile Russian ultimatum dragged the Ottomans into a war that culminated in a tragic defeat. At the end of the war, Russian troops pressed forward, and camped before Istanbul. The peace treaty of St Stefano brought heavy economic and financial burdens. The proposal for conciliation by England, on reiteration of the peace treaty with Russia, was accepted by the Sublime Porte under more favorable conditions. The high expectations of the Ottoman statesmen were not met in Berlin, and meetings ended in disappointment. The Berlin Conference had had little positive impact on Ottoman politics and diplomacy. In return for conciliation, England occupied Cyprus, and had more commercial and strategic benefits (Zürcher, 1994).

Until the Russian war, the Sublime Porte still had hopes to keep the unification of the Empire through granting more rights to its Christian subjects. The policy of Sultan Abdulhamid II can be considered as a reaction to the insurrections of the Christian subjects, despite all political concessions. Abdulhamid, then began following a more conservative policy at home and abroad (İnalcık, 1941).[14] Any kind of opposition could hardly find a legal political platform. The parliament was suspended after the Russian war, and re-opened thirty years later, in 1908.

During Sultan Abdulhamid II's reign, the treasury became bankrupt. The dethronement of Abdulaziz was actually based on an economic, rather than a political crisis. Already in 1875, the Finance Minister had declared the inability of the Ottoman treasury to pay even the interests of the accumulated debts (For details see: Arı, 2001, Yeniay, 1936; İrtem, 1999). Abdulhamid was faced with the additional burden of the Russian war expenditures, and war indemnity. In 1881, a commission of "General Debts" was established to collect cash revenues, and reimburse the loans. Only the remaining amount would be spent by the Ottoman government. Sultan Abdulhamid II, at this initial stage, succeeded in reducing the total amount of debts by 50%. Through this step, he expected to guarantee the regular payment and prevent the intervention of foreign powers. The commission would represent the capitals of lending countries.[15] However, rather than reckoning with the past debts, the administration of "General Debts" tried to organize an Ottoman financial plan through imposing new rules.

14 Abdulhamid's domestic and foreign policies can be found in the observations of a bureaucrat in the court palace. (Örikağasızade, 2007)

15 The reckoned amount for the debts was about 30% of the total Ottoman budgetary revenues.

Under these circumstances, Abdulhamid II was careful enough to maintain peace. He was reluctant to engage in any war, except for the provocations from Greece (1897). Greek authorities must have expected European intervention in that war, as witnessed many times before. When unable to stop Greek aggression, the Ottoman troops advanced towards Athens. Within one-month, the Greek army was heavily defeated. A year before, Armenian terrorists in Istanbul had occupied and bombed the Ottoman Bank headquarters in Pera (1896). Furthermore, they were protected by the foreign embassies in Istanbul, so that they could flee without any persecution in the Ottoman capital. These two incidents alarmed the Ottoman Sultan to take strict security measures in all respects and security concerns affected his ruling practices.

During his reign, Sultan Abdulhamid II had spent great efforts to equip the capital and major cities in the countryside with modern schools of Administrative Sciences, Justice, Languages, Art and Sciences, Commerce, Agriculture, Veterinary, and Industry. In 1900, a university in Istanbul was also inaugurated. Sultans Selim III and Abdulaziz could opened only symbolic Western-style educational institutions. At the turn of the 19th century, the Empire would accumulate a well-educated group of intellectuals who would carry out the remnants of the collapsed state to build up the Republic.[16]

Sultan Abdulhamid II, who remained in power for 33 years, carried out a strict administration in many respects. His direct involvement with the state mechanism is controversial among historians. While some of them praise him as salvaging and sustaining the Empire for more than a quarter of a century, others severely criticize his practices and overall control on society. To some extent, both are true. The financial situation was already characterised heavy debts. The salaries could hardly be paid every two months. It was not easy to create new sources of revenues. Nevertheless, he was able to establish modern educational institutions all over the country. The construction of ports, railway lines, new roads, and irrigation projects, together with the purchase of modern weapons required additional financial support. He could attain these funds from foreign sources, generally at the expense of abuses, generated both from inside (high bureaucracy) and abroad (banks and entrepreneurs). Despite being aware of higher costs, he insisted on such investments. However, the Empire was vast, backward, and required huge amounts to achieve transformation of the whole country into a modern state. The Sultan implemented many of the profitable projects through playing one

16 The story of the Ottoman modernization process is well summarized with striking examples by a recent study by Jean-François Solnon on the Ottoman Empire and Europe in French. The volume is available in Turkish "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Avrupa" (2019). However, there were frictions between the educated and uneducated officers in the army, who were the offspring of an ancient system (See Ölmez, 2017).

European state against the other. He applied every diplomatic measure to benefit from the ongoing competition among them. Previous English-French economic rivalry on Ottoman lands escalated with the involvement of Germany. Especially railway construction was more than an economic investment, it was a strategic one. After years of playing chess behind diplomatic doors, Germany would be the winner. This choice also reflected the future of the Sublime Porte in the case of a long-expected great war. However, when the war broke out, Sultan Abdulhamid would no longer remain on the Ottoman throne.

Towards the end of his reign, Sultan Abdulhamid inaugurated the construction of the Baghdad railway line (for details see: Earle, 1923). Another strategic railway line was extended to Medinah for the pilgrimage. These lines would bring great sums of commercial revenues for the crops of peasants in the countryside. Throughout World War I, Ottoman armies could be easily mobilized thanks to these main railway lines.

The dethronement of Abdulhamid II in 1909 after a military revolt brought the long-expected peace atmosphere neither at home, nor abroad. The Balkan Wars resulted in desperate defeats. Soon afterwards, the World War put an end to the 600 years of the powerful empire that controlled Central Europe, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, Anatolia, the Caucasus, the Persian Sea, the whole Arabian Peninsula, the Red Sea, and the whole of North Africa, from Egypt to Algeria. Losing these huge lands one after another naturally caused Turkish nationalism to rise. Most of the Young Turks movement's ideas in the political, sociological and cultural fields were inherited by the early Republican leaders.[17]

Conclusion

Ottoman attempts at modernization were interrupted by a number of internal and international crises. Those attempts lasted for more than a century. During the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II, many efforts could also be observed particularly in the fields of education, and transportation (especially railway construction). This period of almost a century and a half cannot be considered as a linear timeline for Ottoman modernization. The coup d'etats, rebellions, popular unrest, foreign involvements and interventions, together with long-lasting wars had crucial effects on these attempts. In this regard, Selim III was ambitious. However, most of these practices for modernization were carried out by the statesmen of Sultan Abdulmecid and Sultan Abdulaziz.

17 Both the internal and external political influences of the Western Powers (particularly Great Britain) on the late Ottoman Empire and early Republican period can be followed in P. Philip Graves's work "Briton and Turk" (1946).

This article emphasized critical international developments and military clashes which thoroughly affected the strategies of Ottoman Sultans and the bureaucratic mechanism. Throughout this period, because of these developments, the direction, methodology, necessities, and character of the modernization movement changed. One way or another, the Ottoman statesmen were able to coordinate the Westernization and/or modernization of the Empire. The Ottoman Empire was a modern state, -if not sociologically, and industrially, at least legally- on the eve of World War I. Because of this, although the Empire was heavily defeated and militarily and politically dissolved after the war, the remaining military and civil bureaucracy managed to establish a new and modern state: the Turkish Republic.

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