

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OTTOMAN STATE POLICY DURING THE XVIIITH AND THE XIXTH CENTURIES*

Prof. Dr. YAŞAR YÜCEL — Prof. Dr. ÖZER ERGENÇ

This paper is designed to explain the general characteristics of the Ottoman State policy during the XVIIth and the XVIIIth centuries. Two factors made this essential. The first was the effects the late XVIIIth century socio-economic and cultural changes of the world had on the Ottoman Empire. The second was the chain of developments which extended from 1683 through 1918. These dramatic developments joined with one another and resulted in the collapse of classical empires of the world, Ottoman Empire being one of them. In other words, the First World War ended monarchical empires of classical structures¹. Hence, new and independent states were formed in various regions of wide-spread territories which once were under sovereignty if a single administration recognized as "*pax ottomana*".

What were the causes of these developments? What was the attitude of the Ottoman Empire of classical structure upon these developments? How can the Ottoman approach be evaluated historically?

The fundamental causes of each and every development requires a close consideration in order to reach sound verdicts over these questions.

It is a well known fact that by the beginning of the XVIIth century, the Ottoman Empire no longer had the homogeneous structure it once possessed. The Ottoman victories in the east and the west developed the state into a heterogeneous empire, stretching over three continents². In the west, the entire Balkan region and a large portion of Hungary was under Ottoman rule. In the east, the multi-state Arab-world of today had also

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¹ Yuluğ Tekin Kurat, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Paylaşılması*, Ankara 1976.

² See, Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire, Its Classical Age 1300-1600*, London 1973.

recognized Ottoman sovereignty. The Ottoman rule was also established in Northern and Eastern Black Sea as well as along the African shores of the Mediterranean Sea. In short, different cultures encountering each other since the early days of history became different elements of the Ottoman Empire reaching the Northern Danube area from the Caucasian Mountains. The regional distinctions of these elements could be observed immediately. Nevertheless, the Ottomans attempted keeping them together in a structure in which the absolute sovereignty of the Ottoman Sultan prevailed³.

However, at the end of the XVIIth century, some changes started to take place in the well-known status quo of the world, and continued all through the XVIIIth century. At the end of the XVth century, Europe entered a new phase as the structural changes breeding national monarchies emerged. Through the following centuries, great intercontinental approaches were made while the balance policy was successfully preserved within the continent⁴. These intercontinental approaches were so great that they extended all the way to the far east, and took European influence even to the unknown parts of the world. The expansion was soon to effect the Mediterranean region, where the Ottomans sovereigned. Meanwhile, Austria, considerably alien to the economic and technologic developments of the European states at the shores of the Ocean, lost her sovereignty which she possessed in XVIth century over Spain. Choosing to face east, in the XVIIth century she diverted her eyes upon the Balkans as she performed some economic advancements⁵. Thus, Austria started to be influential in Eastern Europe starting from 1699. During the same time, otocratic Russia displayed a successful westernization⁶, while Prussia developed to be a military state again in the XVIIIth century. Prussia, was to form the Great Germany of the XIXth century in the future. The greatest tragedy of the XIXth century took place in the Balkans over the developments of the previous century. The Balkans under Ottoman sovereignty became the battle field where the conflicting state policies of these newly de-

³ See, İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı*, İstanbul 1983, p. 9.

⁴ See, *Die Grunglegung der modernen Welt*, Fischer Weltgeschichte Bd. 12, Frankfurt a. Main 1967.

⁵ See, İlber Ortaylı, 1727 Osmanlı-Avusturya Sözleşmesi, *SBFD XXVIII/3-4* (1975), pp. 97-109.

⁶ İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı*, p. 21.

veloped big powers clashed. The Balkan Peninsula was one of the most important regions of the world. It contained seven separate ethnical groups, and the authentic population of the peninsula was subjected to various influences through the course of history. It was like a frontier where political and cultural variations collided. It had witnessed the conflicts of the eastern and western Roman Empires, Islam and Christianity, Orthodoxism and Catholicism and finally yielded to the Ottoman rule in the XVIth century⁷. Similar political interests were to be observed in a Mediterranean area, in the Middle East in later years⁸.

During the XIXth century, the big powers carrying the heavy weight of world politics were drenched into paradoxes in order to pursue their own interests. The same century witnessed rapidly approaching Ottoman dispersion due to successful national uprisings at an age the European restoration trophied over nationalism. Europe, shaken by the French Revolution and Napoleonic conquests approached continental problems and performed a general resettlement at the Congress of Vienna. The Holy Alliance formed by Austria, Russia and Prussia discarded nationalism and liberalism⁹. However, these nations refrained from taking the same approach towards the uprisings within the Ottoman Empire. Austria and Russia¹⁰ did not hesitate to spill Hungarian and Polish blood in order to suppress the 1830 and 1848 movements. Yet they became ardent supporters of Balkanic independence. The Europeans openly performed their interventionist and imperialist policies over the Ottoman provinces they found suitable for overseas colonialism. The Navarin incidence which resulted in the Greek victory and Russian approach in the following war which eventually forced the Ottoman Empire to Edirne Treaty may all appear like European support to nationalist movements. However, the contradictory policies of the same states upon the Egyptian question, particularly over French occupation and colonization of Algeria, clearly demonstrated the European inclinations towards the Ottoman Empire in order to acquire new areas of interest for themselves¹¹.

⁷ B. Jelowich, *History of Balkans*, vol 1.

⁸ Yuluğ Tekin Kurat, *op. cit.*, pp. 12.

⁹ Coşkun Üçok, *Siyasi Tarih Dersleri*, Ankara 1957, pp. 94.

¹⁰ See, Coşkun Üçok, *op. cit.*, pp. 161.

¹¹ See, Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, c. VI, VII and VIII.

It was very difficult for the Ottoman Empire to keep up to par with the developments of the XIXth century. Although some fundamental institutions of the classical structure were suspended, the delay in establishing modern institutions and the lapse in their functioning originated various interior questions as well as foreign interventions. European pressure on the Balkans as the Ottoman Empire had to leave her provinces there led to new developments. Besides the tragedies during the uprisings, each of the Balkanic states became a sphere of influence of the European states. This brought great handicaps to the cultural and economic developments of the Balkan States. These handicaps were far more than the deeply criticized Ottoman sovereignty period there. The dramatic consequences of these handicaps can be observed in the Middle East.

In order to explain the classical structure and administration of the Ottoman Empire pertaining to the policies followed especially through the developments of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries, the above perspectives are unavoidable features.

The Ottoman System :

Until the beginning of the XVIIIth century the Ottoman State more or less preserved its fundamental essences. Even the renovations the State attempted were not enough to disrupt these fundamentals which continued until the collapse of the Empire. The administrative and social institutions of the Ottoman State were based on *Islamic regulations*. Accordingly, the world was regarded in two camps, one being *daru'l-Islam* where the Muslims lived, and the other, *daru'l-çihad*, meaning a holy war arena for non-Muslims. It was the Sultan's duty to spread Islamic sovereignty to the largest possible area. Nevertheless, this did not mean exterminating the non-Muslims living in *daru'l-çihad*, but conquering them so that they served Islam. When a region surrendered without resistance, the inhabitants there were allowed to preserve their religion, customs and traditions. They were given religious autonomy under the leadership of their own church leaders¹². The Ottoman Empire was administered by *Şariat*, the Islamic code. The Sultan was the only sovereign all over the land. Theoretically, the subjects of the State were confided to the Sultan by God. The Sultan had to rule his subjects, who were *vedayi-i halik-i kibriya* (gifts of

¹² Halil İnalçık, *İmtiyazât, EF*.

God) with justice. The subjects had to obey the Sultan the *Şerial* named *ulu'l-emr*¹³. The subjects were called *reaya*. The prevalent belief was that the Sultan's just rule over the *reaya* would conduct the *reaya* to a confident life, thus the *reaya* would work and produce under confidence and security which would increase production. The natural consequence of this would certainly be the prosperity of the State. The prosperous State with a full treasury could keep strong armies and fortify the State. This traditional belief established a traditional administration understanding which prevailed since the pre-Ottoman states of the Middle East. The Ottomans accepted the same tradition and developed institutions based on it.

The Ottoman society was divided into two main groups. The first was named *askeri* meaning military, the other, *reaya* meaning the non-military population. The first included all administrative groups assigned duties by the State. This group was exempt from all revenues. The second contained the administered, revenue-paying population. In order to practice authority and receive obedience from his subjects, the Sultan organized a social structure which enabled the existence of various societies classified according to their locations, practices and religions. He restricted all sorts of transfers between these groups. In this system, the non-Muslim *reaya* differed none from the Muslims. Because they were also subjected to *fıkıh*, thus under a *zımni* status, were guaranteed life and property by the Sultan. Their differentiation was valid only as far as certain revenues were concerned¹⁴.

The Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire lived in mutual vicinities and shared social economic relations. Researches prove that the non-Muslims did not form outstanding majorities in the empire with the exception of several non-Muslim settlement areas. They mingled with the Muslims in rural and urban areas. Nevertheless, it is a known fact that these groups of minority were subjected to certain conditions in social life. For example, the cities in pre-Ottoman times were places where the *mahalles* as separate group settlement areas did not form organically supportive integrities. Great walls and gates closing at night were often observed between the *mahalles*. The city was constructed as a *fortrees-city*. The Ottoman system discarded this totally and the cities

¹³ Halil İnalçık, Adâlet-nameler, *TTK Belgeler* 3-4 (1965), pp. 110.

¹⁴ Özer Ergenç, Osmanlı Merkez Askerinin Nitelik ve Fonksiyonları Üzerine, Ankara 1983, pp. 73. (*Birinci Askerî Tarih Semineri, Bildiriler.*)

passed beyond the fortress walls. In addition, the *mahalles* no longer were districts in which people only with similar identities lived. "Being from the same city" became the popular concept¹⁵. This is why the Ottoman times were named *pax ottomana*.

The Turkish element of Anatolia created the Ottoman Empire. However, various cultures, religions and races became the subjects of the Empire and lived so for a long time. This long political life extends through a time course which includes great changes of the world next to the Ottoman developments. We might briefly recall that the western world passed to the modern ages from the medieval, and than to contemporary times from the modern. New concepts of thoughts appeared through each of these transforms. By the end of the XVIIIth century, Europe was attempting to reconstruct the world under the light of new thoughts. However, the Ottoman developments did not observe the same transforms. The period which lasted until the end of the XVIth century was recognized as the classical period of the Ottoman Empire. This period during which the Ottoman Empire created its own institutions was followed by a period called *post classical* times. This lasted between the years 1580-1830¹⁶. The post-classical period did not change the fundamentals of the elements of the Ottoman system. Nevertheless, some changes were observed in the functioning of some institutions. A certain portion of these changes were due to foreign influences, but they did not resemble the western applications. Starting from 1839, the Ottoman Empire entered a new phase during which she was constantly under the strain of not being able to modernize yet had to encounter new problems. These problems were very general. Still, they are the chief points of this paper. The clash of the two different cultures following totally different routes in the political and military arena naturally originated various developments. The evaluations of this clash within a time span will guide us to the facts.

Changes Observed Within The Ottoman System

In order to pursue a central administration model, the Ottoman Empire implemented two fundamental systems from the date of its foun-

¹⁵ Özer Ergenç, Osmanlı Şehrinde "Mahalle"nin İşlev ve Nitelikleri, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* IV (1984), pp. 69.

¹⁶ Yaşar Yücel, XVI-XVII. Yüzyıllarda Osmanlı İdarî Yapısında Taşra Ümerasının Yerine Dair Düşünceler, TTK *Bellekten* 163 (1977); Özer Ergenç, XVIII. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Taşra Yönetiminin Mali Nitelikleri, *Turkish Studies*.

dation until the end of the XVIth century. One of these systems was called the “*kul*” system, and the other, the “*timar*” system. These two systems allowed a coexistent application of the military, financial and agricultural policies of the State. Following changes took place within these systems during the post-classical period¹⁷:

1. When changes in state administration started to take place, initially observed was the transfer of many *eyalets* and *sancaks* to high ranking officers in İstanbul or commanders at frontiers under a system called *ber vech-i arpalık*. This practice resulted in pashas absences from their stationed posts and the application of their responsibilities by others.

2. A *mansab* during this time was generally assigned for one-year-periods. This bore a political significance such as restricting the governor’s authority as well as increasing the number of administrative candidates.

3. The deterioration of the *kul* system led to variation of sources among the *ehl-i örf* which represented the legislative power of the Sultan. During the classical times, however, only those trained in certain institutions were able to advance to the top positions of the State, providing they proved their knowledge and qualifications and obtained the confidence of the Sultan.

4. When the *sancaks* started to be entrusted to the pashas, they lost their attachments to the governors. The independent functioning system which originated in certain areas and expanded through even the smallest villages caused lack of authority. This application was based on assigning large areas to members of the place under the name of *arpalık* or *paşmaklık*. The governors were not allowed to interfere with such *hass*. Consequently, the authorities of governors within the *eyalets* were considerably restricted. In conclusion, decentralization occurred rapidly.

5. The allotment of an *eyalet* or a *sancak* to a vezir or a pasha through the *arpalık* system, and the absence of these responsible people from their posts due to other duties at the capital or at the frontiers introduced *mütesellims* to they *eyalets* or *sancaks* in the *taşra* to fulfill the duties of the

¹⁷ Yaşar Yücel, Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Desantralizasyona (Adem-i Merkezîyet) Dair Genel Gözlemler, TTK *Bellelen* 152 (1974); Özer Ergenç, XVIII. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Yönetimindeki Değişmeler, XVIII. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Yargı Düzeni and Halil İnalçık, Centralization and Decentralization in Ottoman Administration, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, ed. T. Naft and R. Owen, Southerne Illinois Un. Press 1980, pp. 37.

formers. It became a general practice for a pasha to assign a *mütesellim* to replace himself when a *sancak* or an *eyalet* was assigned to him. The *mütesellim* was determined by the governor and legally started his duty after the *buyuruldu* of the governor, followed by a *ferman* sent from the *Divan*. The *mütesellims* in the course of time, started to be chosen among the notables of the certain *sancak* or *eyalet*.

6. Another development worth attention was the popularity *iltizam* system gained after the *timar* system lost its influence. Through this development, the incomes confided to the *zaims* and *sipahis* within the previous *timar* system started to be converted into *miri mukataa* and were directly turned into the treasury.

The unnegligible expansion of the *has* of the Sultan in the XVIIIth century resulted a decrease in the incomes and a restriction in the authority of the governors. This occurred in such a way that all incomes of a *sancak* next to sources which provided cash income such as customs, *adet-i ağnam*, *cizye*, *mizan*, were attached to a revenue called "*bedel-i sancak*" and were turned to *iltizam*. The procedure prepared the basis for new elements to enter administrative cadres. The new elements to take place among the cadres were again people chosen among the local notables.

7. These revenues were turned into *mültezims* by the *malikane* method, for life-long advantages. The new application brought more permanent results. The central government had started a new procedure in 1695 by turning the *miri mukataas* into the military personnel for life-term *iltizams*. This system named *malikane* in one respect was the collaboration of *iltizam* and *timar* systems. The *mukataa* subject to a *malikane* was presented to an auction with a varying value of 2 to 10 times the annual profit and was confided to the person who gave the highest *muaccele*, in other words, fore-payment. If the son of the *malikane* owner was among those giving the highest *muaccele*, it would be turned over to him. The owner of the *malikane* paid a revenue called *mal* and an addition *harc* called *kalemiye* which was 20 % of the determined revenue. Those authorized to collect, in the course of time, started to send their *mültezims* to collect these sums rather than going personally for collection. The *mültezims* who performed the best revenues in the *malikanes* became the richest people of the location. The *malikane* owners were responsible directly to the capital without any attachments to the *eyalet* or *sancak* through this application. This was the dispersion of the *örf* privilege.

The following results of these applications were to breed serious problems to the Empire:

a. The chain endorsment application, contrary to the expected, brought negative effects to the accurate collection of taxes.

b. The increase and liberization in the *örf* wing of the administration prevented the observense of actions not suitable to laws or *şeriat*.

c. The *kadı*, left alone in controlling those with *örf* authority, encountered difficulties in fulfilling his duty, for he did not possess legislative authority, and from time to time, had to collaborate with the notables of the *taşra*.

d. Additional revenues were added to create new sources to the *has* of the *valis* and *vezirs* which became *miri mukataa*. This placed great burdens on the producers.

e. The revenues such as *avariz* collected in lump sums required a mass of collectors. This resulted in exploitations where the collectors pocketed shares for themselves.

f. *Eşraf* and *ayan* who were the representatives of their regions preferred to increase their financial and authorative powers by joining the state administrators rather than forming a *representation* unit which would enable modernization.

When these problems were put together, they, through the XVIIIth century, thrust the Ottoman Empire into the impossibility of finding solutions. From this point on, the State had to face the difficulty of improving or renewing classical institutions. This difficulty was felt all over the State without exceptions. For example, during this time, Anatolia, which was the cradle of the Empire faced problems varying from security to finances, from military arrangements to juristicion. Yet the theocratic structure and concept of the State registered no changes. The Ottoman Sultan, just as before, was to take the precautions he found necessary to provide the order and safety of the *reaya* as *vedayi-i halik-i kibriya*, and was to issue *adaletnames* to exercise this. The fundamental in the Ottoman classical structure was the "protection of entire subjects". This is why the non-Muslims performed mutually with the Muslims under the protective authority of the Sultan.

During the last quarter of the XVIIIth century, the previously indicated developments started to enforce the Ottoman classical system and originated an era of foreign interferences. The foreign interferences occurred mostly under the pretense of protecting the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire. This was the major problem of the Empire during the XIXth century. The regional uprisings, rebels and provocations of the big powers in the Balkans can be mentioned as obstacles of the XIXth century. Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire was not able to change its classical concepts as she sought solutions to her problems which concentrated on foreign provocations and rearrangements required for her economic and social development. *İttihad-i anasır* concept was prevalent over all rearrangements of the Empire¹⁸.

Precautions were sought to keep all Ottoman subjects together. From a certain point of view, major point of the *Tanzimat Fermanı* which was to provide equality to all subjects was the repetition of the equality all subjects had during the classical times¹⁹. In other words, it was designed to create an Ottoman patriotism through the integrity anticipated among all subjects. This concept preserved validity among all bureaucrats and intelligentsia aiming to renew the empire through the century. In order to preserve the integrity of the State *Muhassılık Meclisleri* were established throughout the *taşra* in addition to organizations of the like in 1840. This originated assemblies, not in the present sense, but in the sense that chosen representatives had a word to say within the State administration²⁰. This system later developed as the *Vilayetler Nizamnamesi* in 1864, and as *İdare-i Umumiyye-i Vilayet Nizamnameleri* in 1871. These codes formed assemblies in certain locations which were composed of administrative members accompanied by local representatives. It was foreseen that half representatives becomposed of Muslims, and the other half, of non-Muslims. When the Ottoman Empire established Parliamentary system for the first time in 1876, the *talimat-ı muvakkata* designed for the selection of the deputies was prepared with great inspirations from the *vilayet nizamnameleri*, and the Ottoman Parliament was composed of the representatives of all elements of the Empire.

¹⁸ İlber Ortaylı, *Türkiye'nin İdari Tarihi*, Ankara 1979, p. 290.

¹⁹ Halil İnalçık, Gülhane Hattı Hümayunu, TTK *Belleten* 112 (1964), pp. 604.

²⁰ Musa Çadırcı, *Tanzimat Döneminde Türkiye'de Yönetim* (1839-1856), TTK *Belleten* 203 (1988), pp. 601-626; Musa Çadırcı, *Eyalet ve Sancaklarda Meclislerin Oluşturulması*, *Ord. Prof. Yusuf Hikmet Bayur'a Armağan*, Ankara 1985, pp. 257-277.

It is possible to state in summary that when Ottoman Empire was unable to reach the anticipated result upon modernization of the institutions of the classical times, due to the problems she encountered during modernization like other on pries. The difficulties involved all subjects. However, the big powers succeeded in cornering the Ottoman Empire with the pretense of obtaining the protectorate of the non-Muslims of the State. Their aims were totally political. The Ottoman Empire had to assure the protections of non-Muslims to Russia in 1774, and once again in 1856 after obtaining a victory over Russia by foreign support. While Ottoman Empire made these promises, those requesting this warranty from the Empire were busy creating bloody incidences in other corners of the world, over people they considered their own subjects.

