Pathways to Modernity: Ottoman Reforms Before and During the Tanzimat
Modernliğe Giden Yol: Tanzimat Öncesi ve Tanzimat Dönemi Osmanlı Reformları

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Abstract

This study analyses the modernisation efforts within the Ottoman Empire during the pre-Tanzimat and Tanzimat periods, examining the intricate balance between Westernisation and genuine modernisation strategies. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Ottoman Empire faced significant military, economic, and administrative challenges, prompting a decisive shift towards comprehensive reforms in socio-cultural, military, and administrative domains. These profound reforms were primarily driven by the imperative to address the empire's perceived "backwardness" in comparison to Europe and to safeguard its territorial integrity. During the Tanzimat period (1839-1876), the Empire undertook extensive reforms in governance, fiscal policies, and civil rights, particularly through the Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu and the Islahat Fermanı. While these reforms laid the groundwork for subsequent modernization efforts, they encountered substantial resistance from entrenched social and political structures and were subject to intense scrutiny. This article meticulously examines the inception of the Ottoman Empire's modernisation process, elucidating the Empire's strategic efforts to advance and sustain modernisation amidst the intricate balance between the influences of Western modernity and the preservation of Ottoman heritage and traditional values. Within this framework, it underscores the continuity of reforms and modernization from the late 18th century through to the Republican era.

Keywords: *Modernity, Modernisation, Ottoman Empire, Westernisation, Tanzimat*

Özet

Bu çalışma Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Tanzimat öncesi ve Tanzimat dönemlerindeki modernleşme çabalarını Batılılaşma ile gerçek modernleşme stratejileri arasındaki karmaşık denge içerisinde analiz etmektedir. Osmanlı Devleti 18. yüzyılın sonları ve 19. yüzyılın başlarında önemli askeri, ekonomik ve idari zorluklarla karşılaştığında sosyo-kültürel, askeri ve idari alanlarda köklü reformlar yapmaya yönelmiştir. Bu köklü reformların hayata geçirilmesinin temel nedeni İmparatorluğun Avrupa'ya kıyasla "geri kalmışlığını" gidermeye çalışmak ve toprak bütünlüğünü korumaktı. Bu çerçevede Tanzimat döneminde (1839-1876) özellikle Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu ve Islahat Fermanı

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aracılığıyla yönetişim, mali politikalar ve medeni haklar çerçevesinde kapsamlı reformlar yapılmıştır. Bu reformlar sonraki dönemlerde gerçekleştirilecek olan modernleşme hareketleri için zemin hazırlarken, kökleşmiş sosyal ve siyasi yapılar tarafından dirençle karşılaşmış ve derinden eleştirilmiştir. Bu makale Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun modernleşme sürecinin başlangıç noktasını ayrıntılı bir şekilde incelemekte, İmparatorluğun modernleşmeye yönelik stratejik adımlarını, Batı modernitesinin etkileri ve Osmanlı mirasının ve geleneksel değerlerin korunması arasındaki karmaşık denge içerisinde nasıl geliştirmeye ve sürdürmeye çalıştığını varolduğunu ortaya koymakta, bu çerçevede 18. Yüzyılın sonlarından Cumhuriyet dönemine kadar yenilik yahut modernleşme bağlamında bir süreklilik ilişkisinin olduğunu vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Modernite, Modernleşme, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Batılılaşma, Tanzimat*

The modernization initiatives in the Ottoman Empire during the pre-Tanzimat and Tanzimat periods represent a pivotal epoch in the empire's history, epitomizing its efforts to navigate profound internal and external tribulations. This transformative era is distinguished by substantial reforms aimed at reinvigorating the empire's waning authority, which was increasingly perceived as "backward" relative to the swiftly advancing European powers. The impetus for these reforms arose from an imperative need to adapt, survive, and uphold territorial integrity within an accelerating global milieu. The late 18th and early 19th centuries saw the Ottoman Empire grappling with myriad military, economic, and administrative challenges that necessitated comprehensive modernization efforts. These challenges underscored the need for profound changes aimed at overhauling the state's apparatus, progressing beyond mere emulation of Western practices to embrace genuine modernization strategies. The pre-Tanzimat period set the stage for these reforms, marked by early efforts to integrate Western military techniques and administrative practices. The impetus for reform was rooted in pragmatic concerns about the empire's declining influence and escalating external threats. During the pre-Tanzimat period, initial reform attempts began to surface, focusing primarily on military and administrative spheres. These early efforts were crucial in laying the foundational groundwork for the more extensive reforms that characterized the Tanzimat era. Driven by the urgent need to address the empire's vulnerabilities, these preliminary reforms included adopting Western-style military training and restructuring administrative functions to improve efficiency and centralize authority. These endeavours were not merely superficial imitations but reflected a conscious strategy to modernize the state's infrastructure and bolster its capacity to respond to both internal and external pressures.

The Tanzimat period (1839-1876) represents a more structured and far-reaching phase of reform, highlighted by landmark decrees such as the 'Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu' (1839) and the 'Islahat Fermanı' (1856). These reforms aimed to modernize the empire comprehensively, encompassing legal, administrative,

and social dimensions. The introduction of new legal codes, inspired by European models, sought to establish a more equitable and standardized system of justice. Administrative reforms during this period included the creation of new governmental institutions designed to implement modern bureaucratic practices, thereby enhancing the state's ability to govern effectively. The motivation behind these reforms was multifaceted. On one hand, there was a pressing need to rejuvenate the empire's administrative and military capabilities to safeguard its territorial integrity and sovereignty. On the other hand, the reforms were driven by a desire to project an image of progress and modernity to both domestic and international audiences. This dual motivation underscores the complexity of the modernisation process, which involved balancing the adoption of Western practices with the preservation of Ottoman identity and autonomy.

In examining the modernization efforts during the pre-Tanzimat and Tanzimat periods, it is essential to consider both the achievements and limitations of these reforms. While significant strides were made in modernizing the state's infrastructure and legal framework, the implementation of these reforms often encountered resistance from entrenched interests and traditional power structures. Moreover, the top-down nature of the reforms meant that they were not always fully embraced by the broader population, leading to varying degrees of success in different regions of the empire.

Within this perspective, this study will focus on the modernization process during the pre-Tanzimat and Tanzimat periods, exploring the extent to which these reforms constituted genuine modernization efforts versus mere Westernisation. By analysing the historical context, motivations, and outcomes of these initiatives, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the Ottoman Empire's approach to modernisation and its implications for the broader trajectory of Ottoman and Turkish history. The research methodology includes a comprehensive review of primary and secondary historical sources, critical analysis of reform edicts and official documents from the period, and a comparative analysis with contemporary European modernisation efforts. This multi-faceted approach allows for a thorough examination of the socio-political and economic impacts of the reforms and provides insights into the continuity and changes in the Ottoman modernisation process.

1. Historical Background: Pre-Tanzimat Era

The grand rupture that began with the Renaissance in Western Europe brought forth a new world, fundamentally reshaping the socio-cultural structure. This significant transformation accelerated and took on concrete form during the 19th century, particularly with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. In contrast, a close examination of Türkiye's modernisation reveals the absence of such a historical development. In the Ottoman Empire modernisation was not shaped by the demands of socio-cultural and economic spheres. Instead, it began with the

restructuring of the military along Western lines to address the Empire's lagging behind. This process can be seen more as an attempt to remedy existing "backwardness" rather than an effort to create a new world as required by modernity. This difference highlights the unique trajectory of modernization in the Ottoman Empire, driven by immediate practical needs rather than an organic evolution shaped by internal socio-cultural dynamics.

Türkiye's modernization process can be traced to the late Ottoman Empire and continued into the Republic of Türkiye, forming a continuum referred to as the 'Westernisation' process. This transformation reflects a series of complementary steps linking the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Türkiye. Initially centred on radical military reforms inspired by Western models, these efforts gradually extended to more contemporary and sophisticated structures in economic, political, social, and cultural areas. Significant reforms were implemented in education, law, administrative structures, and the economy. As highlighted by Zürcher (2004) and Mardin (2021) modernisation in the Ottoman Empire extended beyond the state and its organs, encompassing a broader societal transformation.

The Ottoman modernisation process began with institutional renewals, initially lacking socio-cultural and economic transformations. However, these changes expanded to all areas, particularly after the First Constitutional Era. In both the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Türkiye, modernisation can be seen as a planned, state-directed process of change. The Republic of Türkiye approached this process more systematically, revisiting and advancing the Tanzimat reforms to establish a dominant Western-style influence throughout society. It is crucial to recognize that Türkiye's modernisation process did not begin with the Republic. Instead, it has roots in the Ottoman period. Consequently, it must be pondered: at what point did the process of modernization truly commence during the Ottoman era? Through which mechanisms transformation progressed? And what criteria can be employed to effectively periodize this extensive historical process?

Some scholars examining the modernisation efforts in the Ottoman Empire generally focus on the period following the Tanzimat Edict (1839). Among these scholars, one of the leading figures, Mardin (1962), emphasizes that Turkish modernisation began with the Ottoman Empire's attempts at reform. The first aspect to be addressed here is the introduction of printing. The printing press played an important role in disseminating modern ideas, structures, information, and forms.

The significance of the printing press in spreading these elements became particularly evident during the Tanzimat period. The foundations of the modern printing press are attributed to the German Johannes Gutenberg in 1440. Here is the revised paragraph with "initial" used only once: Only 53 years after

Gutenberg's initial endeavours, the first printing activity in Istanbul began in 1493 (Beydilli, 2003, p. 105). However, this printing press in the Ottoman Empire was not established by Turks, but by two Jewish brothers, David and Samuel ben Nahmias, who had migrated from Spain (Beydilli, 2003, p. 105). The printing activities conducted by Turks themselves commenced in the 18th century. In the early 18th century, under the leadership of İbrahim Müteferrika, a Hungarian-born figure, printing activities emerged in the Ottoman Empire. İbrahim Müteferrika, with the support of Grand Vizier Damat İbrahim Pasha and other state officials, obtained permission from Sultan Ahmed III in 1727 to establish a printing press. This was the first official permit for a printing press in the Ottoman Empire.

The first work published at Müteferrika's press was the 'Vankulu Lügati,' an Arabic-Turkish dictionary, in 1729. Müteferrika's press utilized special typefaces designed to accommodate both the Arabic script and the characteristics of Ottoman Turkish. The press printed books on geography, history, astronomy, and particularly religious and educational texts. The establishment of the printing press accelerated the dissemination of new knowledge among Ottoman intellectuals and scholars. The ease of access to information and the expansion of intellectual exchange marked a significant transformation in the intellectual and cultural life of the Ottoman Empire. This process can be considered one of the seminal steps on the path to modernization for the Ottoman Empire. İbrahim Müteferrika's efforts constituted the starting point of a Western-style scientific and cultural awakening in the Ottoman Empire. The proliferation of printing played a pivotal role in disseminating knowledge and ideas to broader audiences. Particularly during the Tanzimat period, the printing press became an effective tool for announcing and implementing reforms to the public. However, a closer examination of the history of printing reveals that while the printing press quickly altered the political and social structures in Europe, its impact in the Ottoman Empire was more gradual. This influence became more pronounced especially after 1830.

The 18th century was a period when the printing press became widespread in the Ottoman Empire and the profound changes in Europe began to be felt within Ottoman society. This century became remarkable while since then Ottoman rulers've began to assess the impacts of these changes and faced defeats after a long period of dominance. This period marked significant transformations in the Ottoman Empire both technologically and socio-politically. The reign of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807) coincided with the deep transformations in Europe triggered by the French Revolution. During this period, while Europe was becoming acquainted with new values and phenomena such as human rights, the rule of law, the bourgeois class, banking systems, urbanisation, and the redesign of social life to drive capitalist production, advancements in science and

technology, particularly in the military field, led to the relative decline of the Ottoman Empire. The Empire's superiority over European countries began to wane gradually as a result of these scientific and technological advancements. The first major threat the Ottoman Empire faced in the 18th century did not come from Western Europe but from the Russian Empire in the east. Under the reign of Peter the Great, Russia strengthened its military and administrative structures through Western-style modernisation processes, becoming a significant rival to the Ottoman Empire. As Russia gained power, it increasingly clashed with the Ottoman Empire over territories. During this process, the deterioration of the Janissary Corps and other internal issues led to the military weakening of the Ottoman Empire, culminating in the first major defeat at the hands of Russia with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774.

The Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774 starkly exposed the collapse within the Ottoman military structure. For the first time in Ottoman history, the loss of Crimea—a region with a Turkish and Muslim population—and the obligation to pay war indemnities marked a significant turning point for the Empire. This defeat had another devastating aspect: until 1774, the Ottoman Sultan perceived himself as the sole ruler and master of the world, considering all other monarchs as secondary. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca implicitly acknowledged the Russian Emperor as an equal. The deterioration of the army and its backbone, the Janissaries, became increasingly apparent during this period.

Sultan Mustafa III, who had spent twenty-seven years in seclusion, deeply felt the consequences of this severe defeat. His son, Selim III, witnessed his father's sorrows at the age of thirteen when the treaty was signed. Before the war ended, Sultan Mustafa III passed away, and Selim III's uncle, Abdulhamid I, ascended to the throne due to Selim's young age. Abdulhamid I signed the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. Sultan Mustafa III was the first to deeply feel the repercussions of the Ottoman military's decline. His reign saw the establishment of the Imperial Naval Engineering School (Mühendishane-i Bahri Hümayun), which played a pivotal role in initiating reform efforts in the Empire. This institution, which opened after the Ottoman Navy's defeat at the Battle of Chesme on 5-7 July 1770, during the Russo-Turkish War, paved the way for Western-style military education (Beydilli, 2020, p. 513). Technical books used in this school were imported from France, and the curriculum was heavily influenced by Western thought traditions that shaped intellectual life in the West (Kaçar, 1994, p. 63).

The causes of defeats and stagnation in the Ottoman Empire began to be investigated from the 1720s onwards, as Mardin (2021, p. 10) notes. During these years, statesmen like Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi and Mehmed Said Efendi were sent to Europe to monitor and learn from European developments, strengthen diplomatic relations with Europe, and develop potential alliances. Yirmisekiz

Mehmed Çelebi became the first person to represent the Ottoman Empire in Western Europe as an ambassador. His tenure as the Ottoman envoy to Paris (1720-21) provided significant insights into the political, social, and technological structures of Western Europe, which influenced Ottoman modernisation efforts (Mardin, 2000, p. 11). During this period, Ottoman diplomacy aimed not only at political and military engagements but also at cultural and scientific exchanges. Diplomatic missions extended beyond political and military affairs to include the exchange of cultural and scientific knowledge. As Şerif Mardin (2021) noted, "Proposals for 'reform' (Tanzimat) based on using the West as a general 'model' for the Ottoman Empire also originated from this period" (p. 11).

The decisive factor behind the pre-Tanzimat reform movements was the notion of lagging behind the West, particularly in military structures and technologies. It was believed that military reasons were the most critical determinants in wars.[1] As defeats increased, the reasons for this backwardness became more widely debated. Consequently, the first modernisation attempts in the Ottoman Empire began in the military, as Ortaylı (2005, p. 24) emphasizes, "out of necessity." The first significant reform movement was initiated in the military, as we will discuss below, and the first substantial resistance came from within the army, specifically from the Janissaries, who represented the traditional structure. By the late 1700s the Janissaries, who formed the backbone of the Ottoman army, had become a significant obstacle to the empire's modernisation process. Initially established as an elite military unit, the Janissaries gradually strayed from military discipline, transforming into a political and economic power. As a result of this corruption, they were able to resist military reforms, make political interventions, exert economic pressures on the state, and create social instabilities. This situation hindered the Ottoman Empire's ability to compete militarily and technologically with Western powers. Additionally, it led to a series of social and economic problems within the empire's internal structure.

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[1] Within this framework, a report prepared during the Ottoman Empire clearly illustrated the gradual corruption of its military structure. Commissioned by Sultan Murad IV, the report by Ottoman statesman Koçi Bey in the 1630s, known as the "Koçi Bey Risalesi" (Koçi Bey Treatise) detailed how the Janissaries came to dominate all aspects of the empire. The report, crafted with a highly critical perspective, includes the following statement: "Viziers, courtiers, and heirs apparent all chased after them (the Janissaries) to attain power" (Danışman, 1972, p. 18). From the first half of the 17th century onwards, the Janissaries significantly increased their influence over Ottoman governance. In 1628, for the first time, a former Janissary commander, with the support of the head of the ulema, the Sheikh-ul-Islam, became the Grand Vizier. The period in which the report was prepared coincided precisely with the era when the Janissaries began to encircle Ottoman power. Over time, the Janissaries effectively began to dictate the selection of sultans. As İnalcık (2016, p.165) points out, the Janissaries thus distanced themselves from their military origins, transforming into a quasi-guild demanding economic privileges, such as engaging in trade, rather than remaining solely a military class.

Perhaps most importantly, the Janissaries and the ulema class moved in the same direction, compounding the issue.

The first significant move against the Janissaries was undertaken by Sultan Selim III. Nurtured under the compassionate and just rule of his uncle, Sultan Abdulhamid I, Selim III ascended the throne on April 7, 1789—a crucial moment coinciding with the dawn of modernity in Europe and the imminent eruption of the French Revolution (which began on May 5, 1789). Selim III was a polymath, an enlightened ruler who composed poetry and music. His multifaceted approach to the world, enriched by diverse perspectives, significantly influenced his governance. This artistic sensibility and occasional indecisiveness, as we shall elucidate, had a notable impact on some of his critical decisions.

When Sultan Selim III assumed to the throne, the Ottoman Empire was exhibiting clear signs of military and political decline. Wars with European powers such as Russia and Austria had depleted the Ottoman's military and financial resources, stretching the empire's boundaries to their limits. The empire was also grappling with administrative corruption and financial crises. Mismanagement in the state administration and an ineffective taxation system further weakened the empire's financial state. Meanwhile, technological and economic advancements in Europe were accelerating, leading to the increased military and economic strength of European states. The challenges faced by the Ottoman Empire at the time of Selim III's ascension, coupled with these European developments, were significant factors influencing his reform initiatives. During this period, while the Empire struggled with both internal and external pressures, the European continent was undergoing rapid change and transformation. This context underscored the importance of Selim III's efforts towards modernisation and restructuring.

Confronted with these harsh realities, Sultan Selim III decided to undertake various reforms to modernise and improve the condition of the empire. His steps towards renewal were considered both ahead of their time and audacious. As İnalcık (2016: p. 169) observed, "In the Ottoman Empire, reform became the concern of only the sultan and his close associates." They were unable to communicate these reforms to powerful groups such as the Janissaries and the Ulema, who wielded significant influence over the populace and governance. At the outset of the reform movements, reformist sultans and state officials were largely isolated. The measures they implemented and the obstacles they faced while on the throne underscore this isolation. Indeed, Sultan Selim III paid for his bold reforms with his life. Sultan Mahmud II narrowly escaped the rebels and, over time, managed to eliminate those who had revolted against Selim III, ultimately abolishing the Janissary Corps in an event known as the "Auspicious Incident" (Vaka-i Hayriye).

Sultan Selim III was the first sultan to recognize that the greatest obstacle to military reform was the existing army itself. For his New Order (Nizam-ı Cedid) to succeed, it was imperative to transform the Janissaries. However, he must have realized the immense challenges such a transformation would entail. Instead of completely abolishing the existing structure, he attempted to establish a new army that would coexist with the Janissaries. In 1793, he commanded the creation of a new military structure within the army to complement the Nizam-ı Cedid. This new army was known as the Nizam-ı Cedid Army.

The new army aimed to modernise the Ottoman Empire's military capabilities and make them competitive with Western states. The Nizam-ı Cedid Army was modelled after European military structures, incorporating European standards in discipline, training, tactics, and armament. This newly established force, composed of volunteer soldiers and organized as a regular cadre, differed significantly from the traditional Ottoman military order. The new structure was financed through a special treasury known as the 'Irad-ı Cedid'. This treasury was supported by new taxes, and the revenues collected were allocated directly to the Nizam-ı Cedid. Beyond merely a financing mechanism, the 'Irad-ı Cedid' represented a critical step in the Ottoman Empire's transition to a European-style financial system.

The reforms of Selim III, particularly the establishment of the Nizam-ı Cedid Army, provoked significant anger among the Janissaries. As noted by Ahmet Cevdet Paşa (1974), the Janissaries not only refused to join the Nizam-ı Cedid but even reacted with statements such as "I would rather become a Moscovite than join the Nizam-ı Cedid!" (p. 313) One of the key features of the new structure was the training and European-style drills, concepts that were foreign to the Janissaries. Having long since distanced themselves from the military profession and engaged in economic activities, they were often described as 'corrupted'. Cevdet Paşa (1972, p. 378) also mentions that the Janissaries derisively referred to the drills of the Nizam-ı Cedid soldiers as "infidel arts." The interventions of the Janissaries in the newly established structure and overall administration persisted from the Kabakçı Mustafa Rebellion to the Vaka-i Hayriye (The Auspicious Incident) on 17 June 1826.

Another significant reform during the pre-Tanzimat era and the reign of Selim III was the establishment of the Imperial School of Military Engineering (Mühendishane-i Berri-i Hümayun) in 1795, marking the empire's second engineering school (Beydilli, 2006, p. 516). This institution, considered a complement to Selim III's comprehensive reforms, played a key role alongside the Nizam-ı Cedid Army and the Imperial School of Naval Engineering (Mühendishane-i Bahri-i Hümayun) in the Ottoman Empire's modernisation process. The school implemented European-style education and drills, directly interacting with Western military doctrines and technologies to leverage these

advancements for the Ottoman context. This interaction was fundamental in the empire's efforts to regain strength in military and technological domains.

In the pre-Tanzimat period, reform efforts were primarily concentrated in the military and to some extent in state administration. The spread of these reforms to social, cultural, economic, and political spheres progressed slowly. With the onset of the Tanzimat era, the pace of these reforms accelerated, making the modernisation efforts initiated by Selim III more evident and widespread across various sectors.

2. Tanzimat Period

Selim III's Nizam-ı Cedid reforms incited significant unrest within the Ottoman Empire. These modern implementations were met with substantial discontent, particularly from the Janissaries and other traditional power centres. Fearing a threat to their status and privileges, the Janissaries, led by Kabakçı Mustafa, revolted in 1807. The Kabakçı Mustafa Rebellion rapidly escalated beyond control, forcing Selim III to abdicate in an attempt to quell the uprising.

Mustafa IV succeeded him, but the turmoil, especially in the capital Istanbul, persisted. The Janissaries harboured intense animosity towards the proponents of modernisation, systematically hunting them down. Alemdar Mustafa Pasha, a loyalist to III. Selim and a fervent believer in the Nizam-ı Cedid reforms, marched on Istanbul with a 16,000-strong army (Karal, 2011, p. 88). Upon arrival, he cleansed the city of insurgents. Alemdar Mustafa Pasha's intervention destabilized Mustafa IV's rule. Foreseeing his dethronement, Mustafa IV ordered the execution of the imprisoned Selim III and Prince Mahmud in the palace; Selim III was killed, but Mahmud II escaped. Alemdar Mustafa Pasha then facilitated the accession of Mahmud II, who had a more reform-oriented governance approach (Karal, 2011, p. 88), securing his ascent to the throne. It appears that Sultan Mahmud II was a ruler who learned from these tragic events. He would soon dismantle the structure responsible for such bloody incidents, establishing himself as the true initiator of modernisation in the Ottoman Empire. Sultan Mahmud II patiently waited from 1808 until 1826, a span of 18 years, while considering the experiences of his uncle, Selim III, and continued to take precautionary measures.

The Janissaries, who had long resisted modernisation and constituted one of the most significant points of resistance within the Empire, were abolished in a very bloody event as a result of Mahmud II's persistent efforts.[2] The annihilation

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[2] The abolition of the Janissaries was such a monumental event that it almost resembled a civil war. An important source, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi* [History of Turkish Armed Forces] (1978), provides the following information about the incident: "During this movement, 3,000 Janissaries were killed, 7-8,000 were captured and executed, and around 200,000 were exiled from Istanbul" (p. 549).

of the Janissaries on 17 June 1826, known as the "Auspicious Incident" (Vaka-i Hayriye), marked the end of their existence. The abolition of the Janissaries was not merely the removal of a military entity but symbolized a pivotal historical development initiating military and political transformation in the Ottoman Empire. Enver Ziya Karal (1964) assesses this event as follows: "The path to Westernization was opened this time, never to be closed again" (p. 589). Taking Karal's view a step further, literary historian and author of textbooks during Atatürk's era, İsmail Habip (1931), describes the Auspicious Incident as: "June 15, 1826... This date marks the Day of the Auspicious Incident. The day of the old's collapse, the truly significant day in our history; the great day at the beginning of our century-long struggle for renewal" (p.18-19). Similarly, Peyami Safa (1981), a distinguished figure in Turkish literature concerning the tradition-modernity context, shares a comparable perspective, regarding the Auspicious Incident as the starting point of the Turkish reform movement: "Since the Auspicious Incident, we have been adapting to a new civilization" (p. 156). The event of abolishing the Janissaries paved the way for the proclamation of the Tanzimat Edict and the ensuing reforms by removing the political and military obstacles. This development was a significant milestone that facilitated the modernisation efforts of Mahmud II and later reformist sultans.

During the reign of Mahmud II (1808-1839) several significant reforms were undertaken following the abolition of the Janissaries, which had been the primary obstacle to modernisation[3]. These reforms included the introduction of compulsory primary education, the establishment of medical and military music schools, and the commencement of instruction in French at the medical school. Additionally, new ministries and councils were created, embassies in Europe were re-established, and Western-style clothing such as frock coats and trousers were adopted. Institutions and practices such as passports, postal services, and quarantine measures were also introduced. In 1837, Mustafa Reşid Pasha founded the "Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances" (Meclis-i Vâlâ-yı Ahkâm-ı Adliye), which was the first modern administrative advisory mechanism (Mardin, 1962, p. 19). In subsequent years, the Sultan began to address this council, sharing his views similarly to European monarchs. This practice paved the way for the opening of democratic channels and set the stage for the establishment of the Parliament in 1876. Consequently, as Berkes (2019, p. 101) observed, the reform initiatives that Selim III began in the military sphere were expanded to a broader range, effectively transforming the regime into the "Nizam-ı Cedid" (New Order). Another significant aspect of Mahmud II's reign was the formation of a modern military-civilian bureaucracy, which would later drive Turkish reform

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[3] I have obtained this information from the 'Westernization Table' in Enver Ziya Karal's work *Osmanlı Tarihi* which is one of the foundational texts on Ottoman history. For detailed information, see Karal (1976, p. 87).

movements during the Tanzimat and subsequent periods. Berkes (2019, p. 171) highlights the importance of this development, noting that during the new era, the governed populace transitioned from being "reâyâ" (subjects) to "tebaa" (citizens) and "halk" (people). Therefore, Mahmud II's era can be seen as a transitional period leading into the Tanzimat era.

The Tanzimat Period, spanning from 1839 to 1878 marks a significant era in the Ottoman Empire's history, beginning with the official declaration of the "Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu" on 3 November 1839.[4] This decree, prepared during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid (who ascended to the throne on 1 July 1839) and read by Mustafa Reşit Pasha, set the stage for the Empire's internal restructuring and its international relations. The motivations behind the proclamation of the Tanzimat Decree included the Ottoman administration's desire to halt its decline and modernise the Empire. Furthermore, the Treaty of Baltalimanı with the British and subsequent similar trade agreements with other European nations, as well as the Egyptian question, played a fundamental role. The Treaty of Baltalimanı and succeeding agreements with major Western European countries reduced the Empire's economic revenues while increasing the number, activities, and issues associated with foreign merchants in Ottoman territories (Akyıldız, 2011, p.1). This situation posed not only a financial challenge for the Ottoman treasury but also led to a significant rise in legal disputes caused by these merchants and economic treatises. Consequently, from May to November 1839, a "Ministry of Trade" and a "Commercial Court" chaired by the Minister of Trade were established to address and resolve these issues (Akyıldız, 2011, p. 2).

Governor of Egypt, Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Pasha, troubled the Ottoman Empire for over eight years, and the costs of suppressing the rebellions he incited strained the Ottoman finances significantly (Akyıldız, 2011, p. 2). The Egyptian issue spanning from the pre-Tanzimat period into the Tanzimat Era was a persistent problem. Mehmet Ali Pasha had established a powerful army using modern techniques and methods, continuously challenging the Ottoman military since the 1830s. His threat to the sultanate was formidable, and he refused to negotiate. In 1832, Mustafa Reşit Pasha was sent to Cairo to persuade Mehmet Ali Pasha. This marked his second mission to Egypt. During the negotiations, the harsh words of Mehmet Ali Pasha regarding Sultan Mahmud II deeply wounded Mustafa Reşit Pasha, who was devotedly loyal to the Sultan. This incident, a turning point for the young diplomat who was just over thirty, played a crucial role in his resolve to modernize the Ottoman Empire. A contemporary diplomat recounts the emotional impact of the event on Reşit Pasha: "These words had such an extraordinary adverse effect on Reşid Bey that he could not remain in the

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[4] Although there is no consensus on when the Tanzimat Period officially ended, there is a general agreement that it concluded with the closure of the Parliament in 1878. For various perspectives and discussions regarding the end of the Tanzimat Period, see Akyıldız (2011, p.1-10).

room any longer. He stepped outside and, in another room, overwhelmed by the fervour of his heartfelt emotions, he began to weep uncontrollably" (p. 52) (cited in Kaynar, 1954). This incident profoundly influenced Reşit Pasha, motivating him to devote the remainder of his life to the modernisation of the Ottoman Empire, striving to ensure that Istanbul and Anatolia could surpass the advanced state of Egypt.

Studies on Ottoman history often highlight three key statesmen who shaped the Tanzimat reforms and influenced the actions of Ottoman sultans during this period: Mustafa Reşit Pasha, Mehmet Emin Ali Pasha, and Keçecizade Fuad Pasha. These three figures, known as the 'Founding Pashas of the Tanzimat'' played key roles in shaping the reforms through their experiences and the personal attitudes of the sultans they served.

Mustafa Reşit Pasha stands out as the architect and most significant figure of the Tanzimat Edict.[5] Orphaned at a young age, Reşit Pasha was self-taught. His entry into the Ottoman state was during the reign of Mahmud II. Serving as a 'mühürdar' (sealer) during the 1828-29 Ottoman-Russian War, Reşit Pasha gained the attention of Mahmud II through his reports from the front (Beydilli, 2020, p. 348). His ability to articulate events in these reports earned the Sultan's appreciation. Consequently, Mahmud II appointed him as the head of his Private Office, marking the beginning of Reşit Pasha's rise in the state apparatus. Following his tenure in the Private Office, he held positions such as ambassador to Paris and London, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Grand Vizier. During these roles he dealt with significant issues of the time, including the British occupation of Algeria and the Egyptian question. Among these, the Egyptian issue was particularly significant, as previously mentioned, and the tragic moments he experienced in its resolution profoundly influenced his role in the Ottoman reform movement.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Mustafa Reşit Pasha read the Tanzimat Edict and subsequently initiated administrative reforms. Following the Egyptian Question, Reşit Pasha forged close relationships with Western powers, particularly the British, in his pursuit of Western-style modernization and reforms, aiming to align the Ottoman Empire with European states[6]. He was a statesman deeply convinced that the survival of the Ottoman Empire hinged on

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[5] In the article on "Tanzimat" in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Akyıldız (2011, p. 1) argues that it is incorrect to attribute the drafting of the Tanzimat Edict solely to Mustafa Reşit Pasha. While Reşit Pasha did hold significant influence over the Sultan at the time, Akyıldız (2011, p. 1) emphasizes that the drafting of the Edict was a collective effort involving not only Reşit Pasha but also Sultan Abdülmecid and the entire Ottoman administration.

[6] As a result of these close relationships, the Viceroy of Egypt, Mehmet Ali Pasha, was brought under control and legally made subordinate to the Ottoman capital, Dersaadet. See Beydilli (2020, p. 349) and Berkes (2019, p. 213).

the establishment of a modern state structure akin to that of Europe (Beydilli, 2020, p. 348). This conviction was significantly influenced by the Egyptian Question, the stance of the Egyptian Governor Mehmet Ali Pasha, and his observations during his ambassadorships in Paris and London.

Another pivotal figure among the architects of the Tanzimat was Mehmet Emin Ali Pasha. Ali Pasha played a crucial role in foreign policy and diplomatic relations during the Tanzimat era. He made significant contributions to the modernization of the Ottoman Empire and the improvement of its relations with Europe. Ali Pasha held critical positions during the Empire's most tumultuous periods. Known for his influence over Sultan Abdülaziz, he, unlike Reşit Pasha, leaned more towards the French line in foreign policy as the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Berkes, 2019, p. 249; Beydilli, 1989, p. 426). He successfully mobilized Britain and France to support the Ottoman Empire against Russia during the Crimean War (1853-1856). However, this support came at a cost. Some clauses of the Paris Peace Treaty (March 30, 1856) and the Reform Edict (18 February 1856), which expanded the rights of non-Muslims, were the price paid for this support. Ali Pasha faced severe criticism for these clauses, particularly from Reşit Pasha, and was dismissed from his position in November 1856 (Beydilli, 1989, p. 425). During his tenure as Grand Vizier and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Pasha grappled with internal and external turmoil, financial issues, and the quest for solutions amidst Europe's turbulent period (Beydilli, 1989, p. 426).

Keçecizade Fuad Pasha, another formidable figure of the Tanzimat period, wielded significant influence alongside Ali Pasha (Köprülü, 1996, p. 204). Similar to Ali Pasha, he was known to be under the sway of French diplomats (Berkes, 2019, p. 249). During this era, France held considerable sway in international affairs. Fuad Pasha served as both Grand Vizier and Minister of Foreign Affairs. He accompanied Sultan Abdülaziz, the first Ottoman sultan to travel abroad, on his European tour. Fuad Pasha adopted a critical stance towards nationalist movements (Köprülü, 1996, p. 205), reflecting his foresight in recognizing the nationalist wave as a tool shaped by Western European powers. He foresaw the potential harm that nationalist movements could inflict on the Empire. Throughout his tenures as Grand Vizier and Minister of Foreign Affairs, he worked to strengthen central governance. Köprülü (1996, p. 205) notes that just before his death, Fuad Pasha wrote a testament to Sultan Abdülaziz, outlining strategies for dealing with European powers. During the Tanzimat Period modernisation efforts became increasingly pronounced, shifting towards legal and social domains. The Tanzimat Edict marked the inception of the Ottoman legal system's evolution towards a modern European legal framework. The Edict proclaimed the principle of equality within state governance, declaring all citizens equal before the law. It introduced the concept of "Ottoman Citizenship," extending legal equality to all subjects of the Empire, which was a significant

development, particularly for non-Muslim citizens. The Edict stipulated that non-Muslims would possess the same legal rights as Muslims, including the obligation to perform military service under equal conditions. Moreover, non-Muslims were subjected to the same taxation rules as Muslims, further promoting legal and social equality. The Edict also guaranteed the protection of life, property, and ownership rights under state security, thus enhancing the bond between the Ottoman State and its citizens beyond the reforms initiated during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II. The Tanzimat Edict symbolized a transformation in the Ottoman Empire's relations with European states, reflecting an effort to establish more equitable relations with Western powers and to position the Empire among modern states.

The Tanzimat Edict symbolized a transformation in the Ottoman Empire's relations with European states, reflecting an effort to establish more equitable relations with Western powers and to position the Empire among modern states. The reforms initiated during the Tanzimat Period led to profound changes in the administrative, legal, military, and social structures of the Ottoman Empire. However, these reforms also encountered various social and political resistances and did not always achieve the desired outcomes. During the Tanzimat Period, after the "Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu", the second significant step toward modernization was marked by the "Islahat Fermanı" (18 February 1856) (Mardin, 2021, p. 14). This decree was essentially imposed as a form of recompense by England and France for their support of the Ottoman Empire against Russia during the Crimean War (1853-1856). Indeed, the Islahat Fermanı was proclaimed just 18 days after the ceasefire of the Crimean War. In exchange for their assistance, England and France demanded that the Ottoman Empire extend further rights to non-Muslims (Beydilli, 1989, p. 425). Their apparent objective was to prevent Russia from making demands on behalf of Orthodox Christian nations at the peace conference in Paris, which followed the end of the Crimean War, leveraging rights claimed since the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (Berkes, 2019, p. 216). The Islahat Fermanı reflected these demands, incorporating provisions that acknowledged the social and ethnic diversity of non-Muslims. Consequently, the decree appeared to terminate the privileged status of Muslims, aiming instead to unify all subjects under the umbrella of 'Ottoman' citizenship, regardless of religious distinction (Mardin, 2021, p. 14). In the Ottoman context, there is a strong correlation between reform movements and the maintenance or renewal of order. Therefore, every decree and legal regulation issued was closely connected to the preservation and continuation of state order and balance within the Empire. Some elements subtly suggested in the Tanzimat Fermanı (such as rights granted to non-Muslims) became more explicit in the Islahat Fermanı, precisely in line with Western European powers' desires. This overt alignment led to significant criticism within the Ottoman administration. The most vocal

and influential criticisms came from Mustafa Reşit Paşa. At the time not holding office, Reşit Paşa argued that the Islahat Fermanı had been prepared without sufficient debate within the state, mainly through negotiations between European ambassadors and two Ottoman statesmen (particularly Fuad Pasha). He contended that the decree contained privileges contrary to Ottoman sovereignty and would incite conflicts between the Muslim population and the Christian subjects (Berkes, 2019, p. 217). According to Reşit Paşa the way to escape Western pressures was not to issue a new decree but to implement the reforms outlined in the previous Tanzimat Fermanı more effectively and widely within the state (Berkes, 2019, p. 217).

Although the Islahat Fermanı was proclaimed as a result of the coercive policies of England and France, it also incorporated several significant positive aspects for the Ottoman Empire in the context of modernisation. The decree advanced the legal and administrative reforms initiated by the Tanzimat Fermanı, including provisions that further centralized and streamlined the administrative structure (Karal, 1976, p. 87). These measures can be seen as complementary elements to the modernization efforts undertaken during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid (1839-1861). As Karal's (1976, p. 87) comprehensive analysis highlights, this period saw the adoption of European laws and regulations, the establishment of modern courts alongside traditional sharia courts, the creation of new ministries and councils, and the implementation of European administrative methods in civil governance, along with the reformation of civil servant status. All these initiatives represented significant steps towards transforming the Ottoman state structure consistent with European models. The era during which the Islahat Fermanı was declared was marked by the rise of nationalist movements and debates over minority rights in Europe. These phenomena were particularly fuelled by Western European powers. This European context had adverse repercussions for the Ottoman Empire; as a result, the Empire was increasingly compelled to confront uprisings and conflicts spurred by nationalist movements, leading to continual struggles with minority groups, which would persist until the Empire's eventual collapse.

From another perspective, it can be argued that the reforms of the Tanzimat Era positively contributed to the Ottoman Empire's image in Europe. As Europe underwent significant transformations from the 1830s to the 1900s, embracing a new economic system and production relations (capitalism and industrialisation), the reforms implemented by the Ottoman Empire can be seen as attempts to align with this new European reality. While the primary goal was to halt the decline of the Empire, maintain internal stability, and resist imperialist interventions, it is evident that there was an effort, supported by the state administration and statesmen, to integrate into the modern state structure, economy, and scientific advancements emerging in Europe. However, as Mardin (2021) notes, "The

Ottoman Empire remained distant from significant historical developments that shaped Western society in the early 19th century, such as the agrarian revolution, market revolution, and industrial revolution" (p. 27). This situation led to the failure of the Ottoman modernisation efforts to permeate the social and cultural domains, resulting in a top-down process of reforms emanating from the state to society. This approach starkly contrasts with the historical development of European modernity. In Europe, particularly after 1789, the political landscape saw the collapse of feudalism and the rise of a new system—capitalism— supported by the growth of the bourgeoisie, industrialisation, and the extension of political rights to a large segment of the population, as Mardin (2021, p. 25) highlights. This reality facilitated the spread of modernity across social, cultural, political, and economic spheres in Europe, reshaping the concept of modernity within these domains. In the Ottoman Empire, however, the reforms and modernisation efforts were confined to the state level, its institutions, and an elite class created by the state. The first major critique of this hierarchical approach came from the Young Ottomans.

3. Modernisation or Westernisation?

Determining whether the Westernisation movement in the Ottoman Empire was a true modernisation effort or was merely an imitation of Western practices requires a deep dive into the historical context, motivations, and outcomes of these initiatives. This analysis is enriched by referring to key sources and scholarly perspectives. The Ottoman Empire, grappling with significant military, economic, and administrative challenges in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, sought to revitalize its declining power. The primary motivation behind these efforts was to address the empire's perceived "backwardness" compared to European powers, which had made significant advances in technology, military tactics, and governance. This pressing needs to reform and strengthen the state apparatus stemmed not merely from a desire to emulate the West but from a critical necessity to survive and maintain territorial integrity. According to Halil İnalcık (2016), the urgency of reform was a pragmatic response to the empire's waning influence and the external threats it faced. The Tanzimat period (1839-1876), as analysed above, marked a series of profound reforms aimed at restructuring the administrative and legal systems of the Ottoman Empire. Key reforms included the introduction of the Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu (1839) and the Islahat Fermanı (1856). These reforms were designed to modernize the empire's governance, improve fiscal policies, and enhance civil rights, especially for non-Muslim subjects. İlber Ortaylı (1994) emphasizes that these reforms were part of a deliberate strategy to integrate Western administrative practices while preserving the core sovereignty of the Ottoman state.

Modernisation, in the context of the Ottoman Empire, implies a systematic and holistic approach to adopting new technologies, administrative practices, and

social reforms aimed at strengthening the state and improving the lives of its citizens. This includes administrative, educational, military, and legal reforms. The creation of new governmental institutions, such as the Council of State (Şura-yı Devlet) and the Court of Appeals (Divan-ı Ahkam-ı Adliye), sought to introduce modern bureaucratic practices. The establishment of new schools and institutions following European models, such as the Imperial School of Military Sciences (Mekteb-i Harbiye) intended to cultivate a new administrative and military elite capable of leading the empire into a modern era. The introduction of modern military tactics and organisation, exemplified by the creation of the Nizam-ı Cedid army under Sultan Selim III, was a significant step toward restructuring the military to align with European standards. Adoption of new legal codes, inspired by European legal systems, aimed to create a more just and equitable society. These legal reforms were crucial in standardizing laws across the empire, thus ensuring better governance and justice. Mardin (1962) notes that these modernisation efforts were part of a broader attempt to reassert Ottoman autonomy and sovereignty in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

Westernisation, on the other hand, often suggests a superficial imitation of Western customs, attire, and lifestyles without a deep integration of underlying principles and values. In the Ottoman case, certain aspects of Westernisation were evident. Changes in dress codes and social customs among the elite, such as wearing Western-style clothing and the adoption of European architectural styles in public buildings, were symbolic of a broader cultural shift that sought to project a modern and progressive image. Another factor is economic dependencies, with increasing reliance on European financial institutions and advisors sometimes leading to economic subordination rather than genuine economic reform. This reliance highlighted the complexities of adopting Western practices without fully integrating the socio-economic foundations that supported them.

Historians like Bernard Lewis (2001) argue that the Tanzimat reforms represented genuine efforts at modernisation. According to Lewis (2001) the reforms aimed at overhauling the administrative machinery of the empire, making it more efficient and responsive to the needs of a modern state. Lewis underscores the transformative potential of these reforms, viewing them as foundational to the later establishment of a modern Turkish state. Others, like Şerif Mardin (2021), provide a more nuanced view, suggesting that while the reforms had elements of modernisation, they were also heavily influenced by Western models, sometimes leading to superficial changes. Mardin (2021) highlights that the reforms were often top-down initiatives that did not always resonate with the broader population. Mardin's analysis indicates that the success of these reforms was uneven, often limited by the existing social and political structures that resisted deep-seated change.

Another important figure in this debate is Halil İnalcık, who provides a comprehensive analysis of the structural changes during this period. İnalcık (1997) notes that the Tanzimat reforms were part of a longer historical trajectory of Ottoman attempts to modernize in response to internal and external pressures. Additionally, İlber Ortaylı's studies highlight the administrative and institutional innovations that were central to the Ottoman modernisation project, emphasizing the role of enlightened bureaucrats who sought to balance traditional Ottoman governance with modern principles (Ortaylı, 1994).

It is imperative to acknowledge that the Westernization movement in the Ottoman Empire encompassed both superficial imitation and authentic modernisation. However, the primary motivations were fundamentally rooted in the urgent necessity to adapt and survive within a rapidly evolving global context. The Tanzimat reforms, in particular, epitomize this intricate interplay between the adoption of Western practices and the pursuit of comprehensive modernization aimed at securing the empire's future. Halil İnalcık's foundational work on the Ottoman Empire, Şerif Mardin's insights into Ottoman thought, and Bernard Lewis's exploration of modern Türkiye are critical to this discussion. İlber Ortaylı's examination of Ottoman administrative reforms also provides a valuable framework for understanding the complexities of the Tanzimat period. These sources collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of Ottoman reforms and the blend of modernization and Westernization that characterized this transformative era.

Conclusion

The Tanzimat period in the Ottoman Empire represents a critical phase of transformation, where extensive reforms were implemented to address significant internal and external challenges. These reforms were pivotal in the empire's efforts to navigate its declining power and adapt to the rapidly evolving global context of the 19th century.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Ottoman Empire faced numerous military, economic, and administrative difficulties that necessitated profound changes. The primary motivation behind these efforts was to counteract the Empire's perceived "backwardness" relative to European advancements in technology, military tactics, and governance. The Tanzimat reforms, initiated in 1839 and continuing until 1876, intended to modernize the state's apparatus comprehensively, moving beyond mere imitation of Western practices. Despite these efforts, the success of the Tanzimat reforms was uneven. While there were significant strides in administrative efficiency and legal standardisation, the reforms often faced resistance from existing social and political structures. This resistance limited the depth of change, making it challenging to implement reforms that resonated with the broader population. The hierarchical approach of the Tanzimat initiatives often failed to engage the larger society, resulting in a

disconnect between the reforms and the people they were meant to benefit. Furthermore, the modernisation efforts during the Tanzimat period were not purely about adopting Western practices. They represented a hybrid model that combined Ottoman traditions with Western modernities. This hybridization was driven by a pragmatic need to maintain sovereignty and adapt to the evolving global context while preserving the empire's cultural and political identity. The Tanzimat reforms symbolized this intricate interplay, leveraging Western administrative, legal, and educational frameworks while striving to enhance the Ottoman socio-political structure.

In this context, the study of the modernisation process during the pre-Tanzimat and Tanzimat periods reveals a nuanced understanding of the Ottoman Empire's approach to modernisation. The reforms were more than mere Westernization; they reflected a strategic adaptation aimed at creating a resilient and forward-looking state structure. This approach sought to balance the adoption of beneficial Western practices with the preservation of the Ottoman Empire's unique historical and cultural legacy.

Fundamentally the Tanzimat period was a crucial era of transformation for the Ottoman Empire. The reforms implemented during this time laid the groundwork for future modernisation efforts, shaping the trajectory of Ottoman and Turkish history. By analysing the historical context, motivations, and outcomes of these initiatives, this study highlights the complexity of the Ottoman modernisation process and its implications for the broader socio-political landscape. The Tanzimat reforms exemplify the empire's strategic efforts to navigate modernity, sought to forge a resilient state capable of enduring the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

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