



Ahmed Esad Pasha's Struggle for Power During the Reign of Sultan Abdulaziz

Sultan Abdülaziz Döneminde Ahmed Esad Paşa'nın İktidar Mücadelesi

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Abstract

This study emphatically highlights the power struggle of Ahmed Esad Pasha with the most influential figures of the era, including Mahmud Nedim Pasha, Mehmed Rüşdü Pasha, Hüseyin Avni Pasha, and Midhat Pasha, during Sultan Abdülaziz's reign. Furthermore, the key aspects of Ahmed Esad Pasha's life are highlighted. He was educated in the West, served as the director of the Mekteb-i Osmani in Paris, the only school opened by the Ottoman Empire in Europe, and gained the appreciation of prominent figures such as Grand Vizier Ali and Keçecizade Fuat Pasha. This led to his rapid advancement in the ranks. Ahmed Esad Pasha served as grand vizier twice, albeit briefly, during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz. This period was characterized by constant changes of grand viziers following the deaths of Ali and Fuat Pashas. He used his time in opposition to identify deficiencies in cities he governed, namely Ankara, Şkodër, Sivas, and Konya, and to initiate reconstruction projects. This study uses various sources to discuss the critical points of Ahmed Esad Pasha's life. These include the Directorate of State Archives, Ottoman Archives, periodicals from the period, memoirs, and secondary sources.

Keywords: Ahmed Esad Pasha, Sultan Abdulaziz, Huseyin Avni Pasha, Mahmud Nedim Pasha.

Öz

Çalışmada Ahmed Esad Paşa'nın Sultan Abdülaziz döneminde devrin önemli aktörleri Mahmud Nedim Paşa, Mehmed Rüşdü Paşa, Hüseyin Avni Paşa ve Midhat Paşa gibi isimler ile girdiği iktidar mücadelesi üzerinde durulmuştur. Ayrıca Batı'da eğitim almış Osmanlı Devleti'nin Avrupa'da açtığı tek okul olan Paris'teki Mekteb-i Osmani'nin müdürlüğünü yapmış, dönemin önemli figürleri sadrazam Ali ve Keçecizade Fuat Paşa'nın takdirini kazanmış ve bu sayede kariyer basamaklarını hızlı bir şekilde tırmanmış olan Ahmed Esad Paşa'nın hayatındaki önemli noktalara vurgu yapılmaya çalışılmıştır. Ahmed Esad Paşa Ali ve Fuat paşaların vefatından sonra sadrazam değişikliklerinin yoğun olarak yaşandığı Sultan Abdülaziz döneminde kısa süreli de olsa iki kere sadrazamlık yapmıştır. Devrin devlet adamları ile girdiği mücadelede iktidarı kaybettiği dönemlerde Ankara, İşkodra, Sivas ve Konya valilikleri sırasında şehirlerin eksiklerini tespit ederek imar faaliyetleri yürütmüştür. Ahmed Esad Paşa'nın hayatının önemli noktalarının ele alınmaya çalışıldığı bu çalışmada Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi, dönemin süreli yayınları, hatıratlar ve ikincil kaynaklar metnin oluşturulmasında kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ahmed Esad Paşa, Sultan Abdülaziz, Hüseyin Avni Paşa, Mahmud Nedim Paşa.

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Introduction

Ahmed Esad Pasha was born in 1828 in Chios as the son of Mehmed Agha, the left “kol aghassi” (senior captain of the left flank). The sources have several accounts about the adventure of Esad Pasha's arrival in Istanbul from Chios. As reported by the newspaper *Ceride-i Havadis*, Captain Halil Rıfat Pasha met Ahmed Esad during his visit to Chios, was impressed by his wisdom and intelligence, and brought him along to enroll him in the Mekteb-i Harbiye (Military Academy). According to the newspaper “*Basiret*,” Ahmed Esad came to Istanbul at a young age and was enrolled in the Mektebi Harbiye by his relative Esad Muhlis Pasha. According to the testimony of Sakızlı Doctor Ali Haydar Pasha, the brother of his mühürdar (private secretary): “*After the death of his father, his uncle Hasan Efendi, the right “kol aghassi” (senior captain of the right flank), sent him to Istanbul with his brother to receive an education.*”¹ Although it is not known precisely how Ahmed Esad came to Istanbul, it is understood that he was from Chios and managed to attract the attention of influential politicians in Istanbul.

Ahmed Esad graduated from Mekteb-i Harbiye on April 9, 1858, with the rank of captain of Erkan-ı Harbiye. He graduated first in a class of 8 consisting of Hasan Rüştü Efendi, Ahmet Münir Efendi, Ahmet Rıza Efendi, Sait Efendi, Mehmet Reşit Efendi, Mehmet Şevki Efendi, and Kazım Efendi.² After graduating from Mekteb-i Harbiye; he was appointed as a Ulum-ı Riyaziye lecturer at the same school and in 1860 he was promoted to the rank of kol aghassi. One of the critical turning points in Ahmed Esad's life was studying in the same class at the Mekteb-i Harbiye with Kazım Efendi, the son of Keçecizade Fuad Pasha, one of the most important statesmen of the period. During a discussion with Kazım Efendi on a lesson, he attracted the attention and appreciation of Fuad Pasha thanks to his quick wit and accuracy. Fuad Pasha, who traveled to Damascus in 1860 to take control of the events that started there, took the young and promising Ahmed Esad with him. His favorable opinion of Ahmed Esad, whom he assigned essential duties here, was reinforced and strengthened over time.³

The fact that he won the appreciation of an essential statesman like Fuad Pasha in his first mission constituted the second important breaking point in Ahmed Esad's life. After returning from Damascus, Fuad Pasha arranged for Ahmed Esad to serve as military attaché at the Paris embassy.⁴ During this assignment, he was appointed as the director of the Paris Mekteb-i Osmani, the only school established by the Ottoman Empire outside its borders, replacing Ali Nizami Bey, and his rank was raised to major.⁵ Ahmed Esad, whose work in Paris both as a military attaché and as the director of the

¹ İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal, *Son Sadrazamlar*, Vol. 1 (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1982), 415; Mehmed Esad, *Mir'at-ı Mekteb-i Harbiye* (İstanbul: Şirket-i Mürettebiye Matbaası, 1310), 265.

² Muharrem Mazlum İşkora, *Harp Akademileri Tarihçesi 1846-1965*, Vol. 1 (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1966), 147.

³ Ali İhsan Gencer, “Ahmed Esad Paşa” TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, II (İstanbul: TDV, 1989), 64.

⁴ Adnan Şişman, *Tanzimat Döneminde Fransa'ya Gönderilen Osmanlı Öğrencileri (1839-1876)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2004), 33.

⁵ BOA, *HR.MKT*, 453/87.

Mekteb-i Osmani was appreciated, was promoted first to the rank of district governor⁶ and then to the rank of miralay (colonel).⁷

Ahmed Esad's educational experience gained during his directorship at Mekteb-i Osmani in Paris led him to establish the "Cemiyet-i Tedrisiye-i İslamiye" upon his return to Istanbul together with Yusuf Ziya Pasha, Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Pasha, Vidinli Hüseyin Tevfik Pasha and Ali Naki Efendi by Sultan Abdülaziz's decree dated March 30, 1863. The purpose of this association was to support the education of the poor and underdeveloped population.⁸

The third turning point in Ahmed Esad's life was Sultan Abdülaziz's visit to Paris. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fuad Bey's presence in Paris alongside the Sultan provided an essential opportunity for Ahmed Esad. Fuad Pasha included Ahmed Esad in the delegation of Sultan Abdülaziz in Paris. During the Sultan's visit to the Archbishop of Paris, the supreme spiritual leader of the French Church, Ahmed Esad, was one of the three members of the delegation.⁹ During his stay in Paris, Ahmed Esad gained the favor of the Sultan. He was promoted to the rank of mirliva by receiving the praise of Âli Pasha, one of the most important figures of the Tanzimat period.¹⁰

Ahmed Esad's rise to the rank of mirliva (brigadier general) in nine years is not standard in Ottoman military history. It was time for Ahmed Esad to return to Istanbul. His rapid rise during his short stay in Paris was closely followed in Istanbul. He would have to deal with the difficulties that awaited him in Istanbul, as Fuad Pasha, who had gone to Nice, France due to illness, died suddenly on February 12, 1869.¹¹ Not long after Fuad Pasha's death, another vital statesman of the period, Âli Pasha, would also die on September 7, 1871, at his mansion in Bebek.¹² Ahmed Esad would feel the absence of these essential statesmen deeply in his struggles with Mahmud Nedim Pasha, Hüseyin Avni Pasha, Midhat Pasha, Mütercim Rüştü Pasha and Şirvânîzâde Rüştü Pasha.

1. Return from Paris to Istanbul

After returning to Istanbul, Esad Pasha lived in hotels and guesthouses for a while. Later, he became a suitor for the mansion of the deceased Yahya Pasha, located in Sarıgözel, Fatih, and bought it for 30 thousand kurus.¹³ When Esad Pasha arrived in Istanbul, the first duty he was given was the position of a member of the Dar-ı Şura-yı Askeri. Esad Pasha's appointment to the position of the member of Dar-ı Şura-yı Askeri was justified by the fact that he had improved himself during his time in Europe and

⁶ BOA, A.Ş. MKT.MHM., 291/4.

⁷ BOA, HR.MKT., 566/101.

⁸ Halis Ayhan ve Hakkı Maviş, "Dârüşşafaka", TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, IX (İstanbul: DİA, 1994), 7.

⁹ Cemal Kutay, *Sultan Abdülaziz'in Avrupa Seyahati* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1991), 42.

¹⁰ BOA, A.Ş. MKT.MHM., 387/66.

¹¹ Yılmaz Öztuna, *Keçecizade Fuat Paşa* (İstanbul: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1988), 60.

¹² Yılmaz Öztuna, *Ali Paşa* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1988), 68.

¹³ BOA, Öİ.DH., 565/39369; BOA, A.Ş. MKT.MHM., 390/69.

successfully fulfilled the duties assigned to him, in addition to his success at the Mekteb-i Harbiye.¹⁴

After serving in various positions in Istanbul for a while, Esad Pasha was appointed the Bosnia Fırka-i Askeri commander on December 20, 1868.¹⁵ Five days after his appointment in Bosnia, he was appointed governor of Shkodër. Assad Pasha, appointed as the governor of Shkodër province, was allocated a salary of 30 thousand kurus.¹⁶ Wanting to express his satisfaction with this appointment, Esad Pasha sent a telegram to Istanbul on December 29. In his telegram, Pasha states that he immediately left Bosnia after receiving the appointment letter, arrived in Shkodër on the Tuesday of Ramadan, and started his duty. In the telegram, he wrote that he had worked hard to fulfill the responsibilities assigned to him before and would fulfill this duty properly.¹⁷

The province of Shkodër, where Esad Pasha was appointed governor, was created in 1867-68 because of the division of Albania into three provinces, namely Ioannina, Bitola, and Shkodër. First, Müşir Pasha, who had been the state's governor since 1864, and then Ömer Fevzi Pasha was appointed governor. The new province of Shkodër consisted of two sanjaks. During his 11-month governorship, Esad Pasha made significant changes in the existing structure of the province. Zadrime, which was no longer a sanjak, and Ohrid and Gusine, which had previously been sanjak centers of the Rumelia province, were attached to the Sanjak of Shkodër as districts. Prizren and Debre were included in the province of Shkodër. The newly organized Prizren Sanjak included the districts of Prizren, Ipek, Yakova, Altuneli, Lum, Pristina, Vulçitrin, and Gilan. On the other hand, the Sanjak of Debre consisted of the districts of Debre, Ilbasan, Mat, and Kalkandelen. The Sanjak of Debre was considerably expanded during the governorship of Esad Pasha.¹⁸ During the 11 months he was in Shkodër, Esad Pasha made some adjustments to the structure of the newly created province, as well as dealing with the problems caused by the non-Muslims in the province because of the provocation of the consuls. He tried to suppress the rebellions of rebels in places such as Budva, Kotor, Montenegro, and Shkodër and to find solutions to various problems.¹⁹

Esad Pasha was appointed Chief of the 1st Army on October 8, 1869, replacing Selim Pasha. The appointment letter stated that he was found suitable for this position due to his competence and merit. Esad Pasha's rise in the state continued. In this promotion process, it can be said that in addition to the fact that Âli Pasha, one of the most important figures of the Tanzimat period, became the grand vizier, essential politicians of the period such as Hüseyin Avni Pasha, Mahmud Nedim Pasha, Mithat Pasha,

¹⁴ BOA, İ.DH.. 571/39806.

¹⁵ BOA, A.}MKT.MHM. 430/21.

¹⁶ BOA, İ.DH.. 585/40718.

¹⁷ BOA, İ.DH.. 586/40800; BOA, A.} MKT.MHM. 433/24.

¹⁸ Mustafa Gençoğlu, "İşkodra Vilayetinin İdari Taksimatı ve Yapısı (1867/1868-1908)", *Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 13, sy 3 (2015): 264.

¹⁹ BOA, HR.MKT. 644/20.

Mütercim Mehmed Rüşdi Pasha, Şîrvânîzâde Rüştü Pasha did not see Esad Pasha as a rival yet.

Esad Pasha was appointed as the chief of the Hassa Army while still serving as the chief of the 1st Army. At the same time, he was given the presidency of the Dâr-ı Şûrâ-yı Askeri and was awarded the first-degree Mecidi Order (state medal of honor).²⁰

King Wilhelm I of Prussia was to be crowned Emperor of Germany. Sultan Abdülaziz deemed it appropriate to send an extraordinary envoy for the ceremony. Esad Pasha, who had previously won the sultan's favor, was appointed for this task. During his stay in Berlin, Esad Pasha was allocated an allowance of 1,500 kurus.²¹ In his report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Esad Pasha stated that the emperor was in Frankfurt when he arrived in Berlin and would receive him at 2 p.m. on Monday after a meeting with the Prussian Minister of Foreign Affairs. At the ceremony, where the Berlin ambassador Y. Aristarki Bey was also present, Esad Pasha presented Emperor Wilhelm I and the Empress with the *Name-i Hümayun* (imperial letter) he had brought with him. Esad Pasha submitted a report on the meeting with the Emperor and Empress of Germany with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In his report, Esad Pasha states that after the reception at 2 o'clock, they had dinner together around 5 o'clock and that he had the opportunity to meet the Emperor and Empress alone. Esad Pasha added at the end of the report that the Emperor and Empress expressed their satisfaction with this visit. After staying in Berlin for a few more days and meeting with the princes, he returned to Istanbul.²² Esad Pasha, who fulfilled this mission as he had done in his previous ones, became a figure his rivals followed carefully and closely.

2. The Years of Struggle in Istanbul

After completing his mission, Esad Pasha went to the mansion of Hüseyin Avni Pasha, the Minister of War, in Kuzguncuk the day after his return to Istanbul. Journalist Charles Mismar, who was there simultaneously, stated that the meeting at the mansion was related to Esad Pasha's visit to Berlin. According to Esad Pasha's statement, during the conversation, the emperor asked him whether the French occupation of Algeria was recognized by the Ottoman Empire and, without waiting for the answer, said, "*Tell the Sultan that it is possible to take back Algeria with money.*" As a justification for this, he stated that after the Battle of Sedan, France had to sell everything to pay the debt of 5 million liras demanded by Germany. Esad Pasha declared to the emperor that the Ottoman Empire did not have the power to convey such a request to France for economic reasons.²³ Hüseyin Avni Pasha summoned Esad Pasha to his mansion in Kuzguncuk the day after his return from Berlin, and his intention was not only to find out what happened in Berlin. Hüseyin Avni Pasha, aware of Sultan Abdülaziz's favoritism

²⁰ BOA, *İ.DH.*. 617/42983; BOA, *İ.DH.*. 622/43231.

²¹ BOA, *İ.HR.*. 249/14784.

²² BOA, *İ.HR.*. 249/14818.

²³ Charles Mismar, *Hatırat-ı Alem-i İslam: İstanbul, Girit, Mısır, Cezayir*, çev. Mehmed Rauf (Bursa: Matbaa-i Vilayet, 1327), 176-177.

towards Esad Pasha, knew that he had to remove him from Istanbul as soon as possible. The death of Fuad Pasha, one of the architects of the Tanzimat, and the poor health of Âli Pasha gave Hüseyin Avni Pasha the opportunity he wanted. In the letter addressed to Esad Pasha stating that he had been appointed as the Governor of Yemen and as the 7th Army's advisor on August 14, 1871, it was noted that his competence and merit were considered in these appointments. Just like Esad Pasha, Hüseyin Avni Pasha also assigned various duties in Yemen to Redif Pasha and Edip Efendi, whom he wanted to remove from the center.²⁴

It soon became apparent that Hüseyin Avni Pasha's concerns were not unfounded. After Âli Pasha's death from tuberculosis on September 7, 1871, Mahmud Nedim Pasha was appointed as Grand Vizier and the Sultan dismissed Hüseyin Avni Pasha from the position of seraskier and replaced him with Esad Pasha.²⁵ According to the statements of Mehmet Atif:

*“Esad Pasha, who boarded the ferry to Yemen, was praying between the sunnah and the fardh when the chamberlain (mabeynci) came from the palace. He said that he was going to notify the imperial decree. Esad Pasha accepted the chamberlain after his prayers were over. The chamberlain informed him that he had been appointed as seraskier and took him to the palace.”*²⁶ According to the statements of Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi, *“Asad Pasha was on his way to Yemen, he was returned from Kale-i Sultani and appointed as seraskier.”*²⁷

Hüseyin Avni Pasha was aware that one of the reasons for his exile to his hometown, Isparta, was Esad Pasha's complaint against him. Esad Pasha had reported to the Mâbeyn-i Hümayun that Hüseyin Avni Pasha had stolen five thousand pouches from the Nizamiye Treasury from the allocation for the furnishings of the Daire-i Hümayun (imperial office).²⁸

After Esad Pasha was appointed seraskier, he was also entrusted with the position of Müşir of Tophane. At the same time, he was awarded an insignia by the German State for his extraordinary ambassadorship in Germany.²⁹ During the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz, the bureaucracy was operating on a slippery slope. Esad Pasha, who went to bed at night as seraskier, would find in the morning that Mahmud Nedim Pasha had

²⁴ BOA, İ.MMS. 42/1702.

²⁵ Mustafa Ali Uysal, *Hüseyin Avni Paşa (1820-1876)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2015), 102.

²⁶ Mehmet Atıf Efendi, *Hâtıra-i Âtıf* (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 2016), 106.

²⁷ Abdurrahman Şeref, *Tarih Musahabeleri* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Âmire, 1340), 188.

²⁸ İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal, “Sultan Abdülaziz’e Dair”, *Türk Tarihi Encümeni Mecmuası*, sy 86 (1341): 178-79.

²⁹ BOA, HR.MKT. 721/62.

appointed him first as Governor of Erzurum and Müşir of the 4th Army³⁰, a day later as Governor of Ankara³¹ and three months later as Governor of Sivas.³²

Mahmud Nedim Pasha's term of office lasted 1 year, 7 months, and 11 days. He made more than enough changes in his sultanate. During his short term of office as mentioned above, he dismissed and replaced five seraskier, four naval, four judicial and five financial ministers, six marshal of artillery, five undersecretaries of the sadaret and six undersecretaries of the seraskier, and many other officials.³³

There were two reasons why Mahmud Nedim Pasha removed Esad Pasha from the center. The first is that he was a name supported by Âli Pasha. After the death of Âli Pasha, Mahmud Nedim Pasha removed the names he supported from Istanbul, some by exiling them and some by giving them positions. The second reason is that Mahmud Nedim Pasha saw Esad Pasha as his rival in Istanbul. Although he was appointed to the position of Seraskier for a short time, he later deemed it appropriate to assign him to cities such as Erzurum, Ankara, and Sivas. After Mahmud Nedim Pasha established the order he wanted in Istanbul, he appointed people close to him and his relatives to specific positions. This situation caused the administrative functioning to deteriorate. When Sultan Abdülaziz realized the problem, he sent an order to the Clerk of the Grand Vizier's Office condemning Mahmud Nedim Pasha.³⁴

Due to the policies implemented by Mahmud Nedim Pasha, a prominent opposition group has formed. Midhat Pasha resigned from the governorship of Baghdad and came to Istanbul because there were salary cuts for officials in the provinces. This situation led to a coalition of opponents around Midhat Pasha against Mahmud Nedim Pasha. Worried about Midhat Pasha's presence in Istanbul, Mahmud Nedim Pasha appointed him as the governor of Edirne. Midhat Pasha initially wanted to refuse the governorship of Edirne, but thinking it would not please Sultan Abdulaziz, he accepted the position and went to thank Sultan Abdulaziz. He informed the Sultan about various abuses and appointments made by Mahmud Nedim Pasha in the government.³⁵ After this meeting between Sultan Abdulaziz and Midhat Pasha, Mahmud Nedim Pasha was dismissed from the post of Grand Vizier, and Midhat Pasha was appointed the Grand Vizier on July 31, 1872.³⁶

Sultan Abdulaziz had pardoned names like Hüseyin Avni Pasha and Şirvânîzâde Rüştü Pasha before the change of viziers. When Midhat Pasha became Grand Vizier, he

³⁰ BOA, *İ.DH.*. 645/44861. Mahmud Nedim Pasha brought Abdi Pasha, the 4th Army Müşiri, to the position of seraskier, which he had taken from Esad Pasha.

³¹ BOA, *İ.DH.*. 645/44865. Mahmud Nedim Pasha appointed Samih Pasha as Governor of Erzurum and Müşir of the 4th Army to replace Esad Pasha.

³² BOA, *İ.DH.*. 650/45218. Mahmud Nedim Pasha appointed Nusret Pasha as Governor of Ankara in place of Esad Pasha.

³³ Demet Karasu, *Mahmud Nedim Paşa (1818-1883)* (Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Tarih Ana Bilim Dalı Yakınçağ Bilim Dalı: Atatürk Üniversitesi, 2019), 86.

³⁴ Mehmed Zeki Pakalın, *Mahmud Nedim Paşa* (İstanbul: Ahmet Sait Matbaası, 1940), 12.

³⁵ Karasu, "Mahmud Nedim Paşa (1818-1883)", 104.

³⁶ BOA, *İ.DUIT.* 190/36.

ensured that Cevdet Pasha, Rasim Pasha, Cemil Pasha, and the Governor of Izmir, Sadık Pasha, who had been removed from the center by Mahmud Nedim Pasha on a pretext, were also pardoned.³⁷ There is no doubt that Esad Pasha also thought that he would return to Istanbul after Midhat Pasha took office. Esad Pasha was not mistaken in this thought and was appointed as the Minister of the Navy on July 31, 1872, with a salary of 50,000 kurush.³⁸

Midhat Pasha's first term as the Grand Vizier lasted 2 months and 19 days, during which Esad Pasha continued as the Minister of the Navy. Sultan Abdulaziz's unstable policies prevented Midhat Pasha from remaining in office longer. After Mütercim Rüşdü Pasha became the Grand Vizier on October 19, 1872, Esad Pasha was appointed as seraskier.³⁹ The term of office of Mütercim Rüşdü Pasha as Grand Vizier was short-lived like that of Midhat Pasha. The reasons behind the 3-month lifespan of his reign can be listed as follows: his serious demeanor, inability to tolerate the palace environment, the failure to pay the installments of the armored vessels ordered from the British, and the intrigues of Hidiv Ismail Pasha.⁴⁰

The removal of Mütercim Rüşdü Pasha was related to his personality and actions, as well as Sultan Abdulaziz's desire to move control from Bâb-ı Âli (the Sublime Porte) to the palace after Ali and Fuad Pashas. This desire was an important reason for the change in Grand Viziers. Sultan Abdulaziz wanted a Grand Vizier who would do everything the palace demanded. The next one replaced any Grand Vizier who couldn't fulfill these demands.

When Mütercim Rüşdü Pasha was dismissed for the reasons mentioned above, it was not very likely that Seraskier Esad Pasha would become Grand Vizier, considering the circumstances of the time. While essential politicians of the period, such as Mahmud Nedim Pasha, Midhat Pasha, and Hüseyin Avni Pasha, Esad Pasha's becoming the Grand Vizier also surprised the palace circle. Ahmet Cevdet Pasha, in his work "Ma'ruzat," mentioned that Esad Pasha had developed himself well in a short period but was not fit for the office of Grand Vizier and seemed small in that position.⁴¹

On February 15, 1873, Sultan Abdulaziz appointed Esad Pasha as Grand Vizier. İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal İnal, in his work "The Last Grand Viziers," pointed out that Esad Pasha, although skilled and valuable, was not suitable for the position of Grand Vizier, lacking both political and administrative experience.⁴² It is said that even Yusuf Kâmil Pasha, who was said to be very fond of Esad Pasha, remarked upon hearing about

³⁷ Midhat Paşa, *Midhat Paşa: Hayat-ı Siyasiyesi, Hidemâtı, Menfa Hayatı : Tabsıra-i İbret* (İstanbul: Hilal Matbaası, 1325), 133.

³⁸ BOA, *İ.DH.*. 655/45534; BOA, *İ.DH.*. 655/45603. Esad Pasha's salary of 50 thousand kurus was later increased to 70 thousand kurus.

³⁹ BOA, *İ.DH.*. 658/45757.

⁴⁰ Süleyman Kocabaş, *Sultan Abdülaziz ve I. Meşrutiyet* (İstanbul: Vatan Yayınları, 2001), 47.

⁴¹ Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Ma'ruzat* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1980), 214.

⁴² İnal, *Son Sadrazamlar*, 1:419.

him becoming Grand Vizier, "*Our master will soon appoint his gatekeepers as Grand Viziers and send them to the gate.*"⁴³

Esad Pasha's tenure as Grand Vizier ended in a short period of 1 month and 28 days. He did not perform well in the position because the Enderun people did not take him seriously, and the Birun wanted to see a competent Grand Vizier. Moreover, Esad Pasha had complained to Sultan Abdülaziz by Hüseyin Avni Pasha and Şîrvânîzâde Rüşdü Pasha because he was not at a level to express his opinion when consulted on state affairs.⁴⁴ Following these complaints, Esad Pasha was removed as Grand Vizier, and Şîrvânîzâde Rüşdü Pasha was appointed in his place. The dismissal of Esad Pasha and the appointment of Şîrvânîzâde Rüşdü Pasha raises the following question: Did who would be appointed to the viziership depend on the persuasiveness of the state officials present at the time, as mentioned before, the lack of a group to support Esad Pasha also contributed to his easy removal from office. A group was working to continue Mahmud Nedim Pasha's grand vizierate despite the grave mistakes he had made during his term.

It was seen as a grave mistake that Esad Pasha, after becoming the Grand Vizier, did not think of removing those he saw as rivals from the center, as Mahmud Nedim Pasha did, but on the contrary, gave essential tasks to those people. Hasan Refet Pasha considers the appointment of Hüseyin Avni Pasha as the Seraskier, Midhat Pasha as the Minister of Justice, and Şîrvânîzâde as the Minister of Finance during Esad Pasha's term as the Grand Vizier as a great mistake, and states that the Pasha dug his own grave.⁴⁵

While Mahmud Celaledin Pasha was explaining the influence of Hüseyin Avni Pasha in this dismissal and appointment, he stated that it was not in Hüseyin Avni Pasha's interest for Esad Pasha to remain as the Grand Vizier and that he was removed from the Grand Viziership because of the cooperation of Midhat Pasha, Şîrvânîzâde Mehmed Rüşdü Pasha and Hüseyin Avni Pasha.⁴⁶

In addition to the reasons mentioned above, Namik Kemal's play "Vatan Yahut Silistre" (Vatan Yahut Silistre) was also effective in removing Esad Pasha from his position as grand vizier in a short period. The riots that broke out after the play disturbed Sultan Abdülaziz very much, but Esad Pasha took the necessary steps to suppress these riots late. Although the decision to exile Namik Kemal and his friends to Magosa was taken during Esad Pasha's regency, this was not enough for Sultan Abdülaziz.⁴⁷

Süleyman Nazif, in his work on Namik Kemal, expresses that Esad Pasha showed an irresolute attitude. He mentions that Âli Pasha made great efforts to implement the rules of the Tanzimat Fermanı (also called "Edict of Gülhane," which is the imperial edict of reorganization), which Mustafa Reşit Pasha vigorously defended, but subsequent grand viziers, including Esad Pasha, did not strive in this regard. Süleyman Nazif

⁴³ İnal, 1:419.

⁴⁴ İnal, *Son Sadrazamlar*, 1:419.

⁴⁵ İnal, 1:419.

⁴⁶ Mahmud Celaledin Paşa, *Mir'at-ı Hakikat* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Osmaniye, 1326), 39.

⁴⁷ Süleyman Nazif, *Namik Kemal* (İstanbul: İkdâm Matbaası, 1346), 44.

even said about Esad Pasha, " Süleyman Nazif even said about Esad Pasha that he wished he had left the country in ruins but continued the work of Mustafa Reşit Pasha." Esad Pasha's impotent behavior prompted Abdülaziz to act more recklessly. Again, according to Süleyman Nazif, Esad Pasha was slapped by the Sultan when he told Sultan Abdülaziz that a decision could not be taken without a trial.⁴⁸ However, according to Ebüzziya Tevfik Bey, "Since Esad Pasha had reached his position with the favor of Sultan Abdülaziz, he could not say that arrests could not be made without a trial, in line with the order brought by the Tanzimat." He had to listen to the Sultan's will and obey the letter.⁴⁹ Ebüzziya Tevfik Bey was surprised that Midhat Pasha, as the Minister of Justice, and Hüseyin Avni Pasha, as the Seraskier, did not object to Sultan Abdulaziz during the extrajudicial arrests and exiles, rather than Esad Pasha, as the Grand Vizier, remaining a spectator to the events. He said both Midhat Pasha and Hüseyin Avni Pasha had greater power than Esad Pasha.⁵⁰

Of course, Esad Pasha was not Mustafa Reşit Pasha or Âli or Fuad Pasha, the architects of the Tanzimat. It would not have been right to expect him to show the same persistence that these names, the most significant statesmen of the 19th century, had shown. As a statesman in the most critical position of the state after the Sultan at a young age, he said what he had to say, which paved the way for the end of his grand vizierate.

Esad Pasha's attitude towards events led to his removal from the position of Grand Vizier and resulted in his being sent away from the center. After being dismissed from the Grand Vizier position, Esad Pasha was appointed the Governor of Konya on April 18, 1873.⁵¹ Despite staying in the position for about 2 years, we see that he fulfilled his duties adequately. Esad Pasha's initial activities as governor included repairing mosques, schools, and government offices and addressing the grain shortage in the province.⁵² Regarding educational activities, Esad Pasha took steps, requesting 100 books and maps from Istanbul for students studying at Konya Rüştîyesi.⁵³ Esad Pasha also requested the establishment of Asakir-i Zabtiye due to the increasing banditry incidents in the province to maintain public order.⁵⁴

On February 14, 1874, there was another change in the Grand Vizier position. Sultan Abdulaziz appointed Huseyin Avni Pasha as Grand Vizier, replacing Shirvanzade Mehmed Rusdu Pasha. Huseyin Avni Pasha's practical criticism of Shirvanzade Mehmed Rusdu Pasha in the presence of Sultan Abdulaziz played a role in this appointment. Upon coming to power, Huseyin Avni Pasha appointed Shirvanzade Mehmet Rusdu Pasha as the Governor of Aleppo and shortly after as the Governor of Hejaz, thus

⁴⁸ Nazif, 44.

⁴⁹ Ebüzziya Tevfik, *Yeni Osmanlılar Tarihi* (İstanbul: Kervan Kitapçılık, 1973), 236.

⁵⁰ Tevfik, 251.

⁵¹ BOA, *İ.DH.* 665/46346.

⁵² BOA, *ŞD.* 1703/34.

⁵³ BOA, *MF.MKT.* 11/78.

⁵⁴ BOA, *İ.ŞD.* 27/1283.

distancing him from Istanbul.⁵⁵ Hüseyin Avni Pasha then appointed Esad Pasha, who had carried out important activities in the Konya province and attracted the attention of Sultan Abdulaziz, as the commander of the 5th army and the Governor of Syria on September 9, 1874, replacing Halet Pasha.⁵⁶

The attitudes of Hüseyin Avni Pasha as a grand vizier began to disturb Sultan Abdulaziz. During a difficult economic period for the state, Hüseyin Avni Pasha's increased wealth through illegitimate means after taking office and the excessive expenses incurred at his daughter's wedding became a topic of discussion among the people, disturbing Sultan Abdulaziz.⁵⁷ Mahmud Celeleddin Pasha states that Esad Pasha, the Governor of Damascus at the time, was one of the close men of Sultan Abdülaziz.⁵⁸ Sultan Abdulaziz, in response to Hüseyin Avni Pasha's behavior, took a step to affirm Celeleddin Pasha's statements by requesting the appointment of Esad Pasha as the Minister of the Navy. In Esad Pasha's appointment letter, it was decided that Ferid Pasha, Mabeyn-i Hümayun Müşiri, would be appointed to this position by proxy until he arrived in Istanbul.⁵⁹

Esad Pasha's return to Istanbul undoubtedly disturbed Hüseyin Avni Pasha. However, the mistakes he had made while in the sultanate and the Sultan's request for Esad Pasha to come to Istanbul caused him to accept this situation. We understand from the statements of Sultan Abdülaziz's chief chamberlain, Mehmed Bey, that Esad Pasha also had an essential influence on the dismissal of Hüseyin Avni Pasha. Mehmed Bey writes that Esad Pasha told Sultan Abdulaziz that a significant portion of the state revenues could only cover the debt interest and that Hüseyin Avni Pasha issued forty million consolidated notes.⁶⁰ Mehmed Bey also states that when Sultan Abdulaziz heard this, he could not leave his bed for three days, and on the fourth day, he called for the dismissal of Hüseyin Avni Pasha and the transfer of the seal of office to Esad Pasha.⁶¹

When Esad Pasha returned to power on April 26, 1875, he did not repeat the mistakes he made during his first term. As Grand Vizier, he appointed Ali Saib Pasha as Seraskier and Rauf Pasha as Minister of the Navy.⁶² Hüseyin Avni Pasha, appointed as the Governor of Aydın, did not want to go to Aydın, citing his illness as an excuse. However, since it was not deemed appropriate for him to stay in Istanbul, he was sent to Izmir by ferry. When Hüseyin Avni Pasha's illness progressed in Izmir, he wanted to go to France for spa treatment, and he was granted the necessary permission.⁶³ Midhat Pasha, another name that led to Esad Pasha's dismissal from his previous position as

⁵⁵ Uysal, *Hüseyin Avni Paşa (1820-1876)*, 120.

⁵⁶ BOA, *İ.DH.*. 689/48133, 9.09.1874.

⁵⁷ Uysal, *Hüseyin Avni Paşa (1820-1876)*, 120.

⁵⁸ Paşa, *Mir'at-ı Hakikat*, 40.

⁵⁹ BOA, *İ.DH.*. 694/48567.

⁶⁰ James W. Redhouse, "konsolide (consolidated)", in *Redhouse Dictionary* (İstanbul: Redhouse Yayınevi, 1968), 673. A government bond where only the interest is paid, and when the principal is paid is uncertain.

⁶¹ Mehmed Hafız, *Hakayıku'l-beyan fi Hakk-ı Cennetmekan Sultan Abdülaziz Han*, 1324, 24-27.

⁶² BOA, *HAT* 1648/58.

⁶³ Uysal, *Hüseyin Avni Paşa (1820-1876)*, 134.

grand vizier, had left the governorship of Thessaloniki in February 1874, returned to Istanbul, and started gardening on his estate.⁶⁴ Shirvanzade Mehmed Rushdi Pasha, who received the Grand Vizier seal after Esad Pasha, died in the garden called Shubra of Mecca Emir Sharif Abdullah Pasha in Taif on September 23, 1874, during his term as the governor of Hejaz.⁶⁵

During his second term as grand vizier, Esad Pasha tightened things up a bit, but his tenure only lasted 4 months. The main event that led to his dismissal during his second term was the Hersek incident. In his memoirs, Mithad Pasha mentions that Esad Pasha did everything Sultan Abdulaziz told him to do, realized that in the Hersek incident, Russia was provoked and noticed that similar chaos to what had been attempted for years in Bulgaria was incited in Hersek this time with the support of the Serbs and Montenegrins. Still, he was unable to do anything out of panic.⁶⁶

Esad Pasha reduced his salary from 50,000 to 200,000 kuruş during his second term and lowered the wages of other politicians by the same percentage, making significant savings in the state budget. While this may seem like a good move for the state economy, it was not a good step for his tenure. None of the state officials welcomed the reduction in their salaries.⁶⁷

During this time, Huseyin Avni Pasha returned from Europe and was appointed as the Governor of Konya. However, due to the efforts of his supporters in the palace, Huseyin Avni Pasha managed to avoid going to Konya and came to Istanbul.⁶⁸ The escalating incidents in Hersek pushed Sultan Abdulaziz to search for a new grand vizier instead of Esad Pasha. Sultan Abdulaziz had no choice for this role except Mahmud Nedim Pasha. However, he did not immediately appoint him as grand vizier due to negative impressions about him. After appointing Mahmud Nedim Pasha to the Presidency of the Council of State, Huseyin Avni Pasha to the Siraskierate, and Midhat Pasha to the Ministry of Justice, he appointed Mahmud Nedim Pasha as grand vizier.⁶⁹ When Mahmud Nedim Pasha entered the Sultan's presence to thank him, he said, "Suppressing the Herzegovina incident is an easy task." However, not only did he fail to suppress the Herzegovina incident, but he also appointed Huseyin Avni Pasha to the governorship of Thessaloniki and then to the governorship of Hüdavendigar with an excuse and made Midhat Pasha leave the Ministry of Justice.⁷⁰

During the grand viziership of Mahmud Nedim Pasha, Esad Pasha was appointed to the Ministry of Public Works. However, Mahmud Nedim Pasha did not keep Esad Pasha in this position for a long time and arranged for him to be appointed Governor of

⁶⁴ Gökhan Çetinsaya ve Ş. Tufan Buzpınar, "Midhat Paşa", TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, XXX (İstanbul: TDV, 2020), 8.

⁶⁵ İnal, *Son Sadrazamlar*, 1:463.

⁶⁶ Paşa, *Midhat Paşa: Hayat-ı Siyasiyesi, Hidemâti, Menfa Hayatı : Tabsıra-i İbret*, 153.

⁶⁷ Gencer, "Ahmed Esad Paşa", 64.

⁶⁸ Uysal, *Huseyin Avni Paşa (1820-1876)*, 134.

⁶⁹ Paşa, *Midhat Paşa: Hayat-ı Siyasiyesi, Hidemâti, Menfa Hayatı : Tabsıra-i İbret*, 155.

⁷⁰ Pakalın, *Mahmud Nedim Paşa*, 62.

Aydın on September 20, 1875.⁷¹ This appointment would be Esad Pasha's final duty. During his visit to Menteşe and Aydın, Esad Pasha visited the marshes and contracted a fever or malaria. He died on November 29, 1875, before he had time to take the medicine that arrived.⁷²

Leon Efendi, who examined him before his death, sent a report to Istanbul. After Pasha's illness, Leon Efendi went to the government house on Saturday, December 9, and examined Pasha. Since Esad Pasha was ill and his illness lasted for a day, he could not attend the dinner given on behalf of Sadık Pasha and the consuls. Leon Efendi diagnosed that Pasha's tongue was yellowing, that he had a severe headache, and that he had contracted malaria from his visits to the province a few days earlier. Leon Efendi left the mansion after administering the necessary medicines. When he revisited Pasha in the evening of the same day, he saw that his malaria had eased a little. When he revisited him after giving him certain medicines, he saw Assad Pasha sitting on the sofa and thought the medicines were working. When he was urgently summoned to the mansion the next day, he realized that the Pasha was vomiting, and his condition was worsening. Leon Efendi stated that Esad Pasha passed away at eight-thirty a.m. on Monday, December 11.⁷³

A year and a half after Esad Pasha's death, granting his wife and son Celaleddin Bey a salary was deemed appropriate. Each was given a salary of two thousand five hundred kurus.⁷⁴

Conclusion

To understand the era of Sultan Abdülaziz well, it is necessary to divide this period into two. The first period is the years spent under the control of Âli and Fuad Pashas. During these years, Sultan Abdülaziz considered the suggestions of two important politicians and implemented their proposals. The second period started after Âli Pasha's death. During these years, Sultan Abdülaziz wanted to control the state and frequently changed grand viziers. At the same time, since there was no prominent politician during this period, a struggle for the position of grand vizier took place among Midhat Pasha, Mahmud Nedim Pasha, Hüseyin Avni Pasha, Mütercim Rüşdü Pasha, Şirvânîzâde Rüşdü Pasha, and Ahmed Esad Pasha.

Esad Pasha quickly rose through the ranks of the state. This rise allowed him to become a grand vizier very young. However, the political environment and conditions of the time prevented both of his grand vizierates from lasting long. His lack of awareness of the intrigues between the palace and Babıali led to wrong choices in his first grand vizierate. After he became Grand Vizier, he should have removed his rivals Hüseyin Avni Pasha and Şirvânîzâde Rüşdü Pasha from the center. Still, on the contrary, he gave them positions, which led to the end of his first grand vizierate. Although he

⁷¹ BOA, *İ.DH.*. 707/49535.

⁷² BOA, *İ.DH.*. 711/49776.

⁷³ BOA, *HR.TO.*. 515/76.

⁷⁴ BOA, *İ.DH.*. 741/60601.

was more careful against his rivals during his second grand vizierate, his failure to take the necessary measures early in the Herzegovina events prepared his end.

Esad Pasha is the youngest among the politicians mentioned above. The others knew that to remain in office, it was not enough to govern well; they also needed to win over the court to their side. They knew how important it was to have a group of supporters in Istanbul and to get along well with European ambassadors. However, Ahmed Asad Pasha had neither a group in the palace that he rallied to his side nor a mass of supporters in Istanbul. Moreover, none of the European envoys mentioned his name to the Sultan. Although there is a grain of truth in the statements that he was Sultan Abdülaziz's man, it is understood from his short tenure as grand vizier that this was not enough to stay in Istanbul as grand vizier.

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