

# POLITICAL HISTORY: ITS SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE

**Doç. Dr. Mediha AKARSLAN**

Kirgiz – Türk Manas Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Öğretim Üyesi

## **Introduction**

Nowadays, there have been big changes in the world. That's to say, in the late 20th century, The Soviet Union and The Eastern Bloc was corrupted. As a result, it was agreed to go into a reduction in conventional and nuclear weapons in the international platform. This was the end of the world's bipolarity - the confrontation between the Atlantic Alliance and the Soviet Bloc. The Balkans are expecting new events and developments.

At present - and also in the past - people are in a psychological state to be ready for loading their daily problems and demands to the knowledge of the future at the point where desperation and hope meet. In order to understand these current events and developments, one should study the events in the past since the past is important when it enlightens the present. It is possible to say the same thing for the future. Therefore, the historian will especially deal with the events and will study the causes of the events, but it is necessary to note that the event is not the only founder of history. The historian should not achieve a "*fetish*" from the events. The causes of the events must be in the study of the historian, but a historical study mostly means a research on the causes. If the study of the causes is not accomplished in the science of history, the thing done will be "*chronology*".

The causes which the historian studies are both plenty and complex. For instance, the causes of The First World War can be composed of the important events in the history of mankind. In fact, even though history does not consist of the laws as in natural sciences, the historian is not contented with the causes and effects of the events since he knows that history means "*action*", so he looks for a "*tendency*" in history, realizing history flows from yesterday to today and tomorrow. In fact, when we say "*a mobile vehicle*", we understand that the object that goes from the (X) point to the (Y) point at a certain speed (Sander, 1992:17). This historical tendency gives the historian

the important data in the understanding of yesterday, today, and, to some extent, tomorrow. In the 1960s, about this issue, *Edward Hallet Carr*, famous British historian notes that:

*“Contemporary man is aware of his existence to certain extent that he has never been before. He enthusiastically studies the glitters that are hardly seen with the hope that they will enlighten “uncertainty” that he is about to achieve; reversibly, his desires and worries about the road ahead of him strengthen the understanding of his followers. The past, the present, and the future are bound to each other with the infinite chain of history” (Carr, 1980:179).*

This means clearly that the historian must find the tendencies of history in order to understand the events of our times and to shed light to the darkness of the future. With the help of the historical events that were studied, the historian can find the historical tendencies step-by-step with an exact scientific study. For instance, the historian who studies the history of Europe in the 19th century will notice that the movements in that period, such as *industrialization*, *liberalism*, and *nationalism*, had an effect-response relationship with the events of the 19th century. This shows that the historian who tries to understand today and to tell something about it must take the *“propulsive”* powers of history into consideration.

The historian who can determine the dynamics of *“mercantilism”* which is about the countries having increased exports of goods produced in order to stabilize the trade relations on behalf of themselves in the 16th century and means prohibiting imports except the vital raw materials will find the propulsive powers of composing the global market at present.

When a historian (**Sander, 1992:17**) points out that:

*“No generation definitely repeats the previous generation; changes cannot be consumed because everything is new”.*

we should think he is right to some extent since the tendencies of history provide *“continuity”* in history as well. Basically, this state which is seen contradictory, in fact, is the sign of *“mobility”* and *“dynamism”* in history. Therefore, history is nothing but the contradiction of change and continuity. Nothing, which is seen continuous in history, can avoid it self from the corrosive effect of the change and no change can make the continuity between the past and the present discontinued even though this change is sudden and severe.

These days, the historians are dealing with the figures like politics, sociology, economics, anthropology, and demography do. Just as, today the principle *“il faut savoir compter”*, that *G. Lefebvre* supported years ago, has been commonly used. When

*Emmanuel Le Roy Laduire*, (Laduire, 1979:15) who was one of the great members of *Annales School*<sup>1</sup>, (See, 1985) notes that:

“History which is not based on figures cannot be a science ”,

he forces the historian to use the computer which is the most important invention in today's world (Laduire, 1979:6).

### I - What's Political History?

Political history is used more restrictively than history. Political history is a part of history. The concept “*political history*” is a term that will cause ambiguity in Turkish. Political history generally mentions “*the formation, the rise, the development, and the fall of states*”(Ünal, 1985:5). In other words, political history tells us about the states, their formations, development, “*fall*”, and also political and economic relations between states. That's why, in the West, this discipline is particularly called “*History of International Relations*”, but in Turkey, the term “*political history*” has been used for about fifty years, so it will be inadequate and difficult to try to change this concept.

Since political history deals with international relations, the researchers who work in this field in the world consider *the French Revolution* (1789) as *the starting date* and generally start their research from the 19th century. In fact, at first sight, it is logical to consider the French Revolution (1789) as the starting date and to start the research from the 19th century since political history is the history of relations between states, but if one looks at the other side of the argument, it is impossible to approve of the present applications because “they make political history *Europe-center*”, as some political historians stated. For that reason, it is advisable to start political history from the ancient times for the values that make Europe superior go back of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is quite important to understand, from the political history point of view, why and how the great civilizations in the Middle East and Asia had collapsed.

When *Alexis de Tocqueville* (Smiles, 1961:26), French politician and historian, points out that:

“The wrong lessons taken from the past are more harmful than not knowing anything about history ”,

from the science of history point of view, he probably says the right thing because in today's world, we should know our origin, but the past does not start at the 19th

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<sup>1</sup> See Boratav, Ali ( 1985 ) *Tarih ve Tarihçi: Annales Okulu İzinde*, Istanbul for further information about this history school, that was first called “ *Annales d' Histoire Economique et Sociale* ” and then only “ *Annales* ”.

century. Studying all the periods in history and knowing. How the values had been achieved is important in order to understand today.

## II - Scope Of Political History

Political history, that tells us about the states, their emergence, change, fall, and political, to some extent, economic relations between state, is composed of two concepts in our language. These are:

- a) *Political History.*
- b) *Diplomatic History.*

### II. a - Political History

It is civil history, which is called "*histoire politique*" in French; studies the formation of the countries, the changes they had, their development, the conflicts between people, classes, and groups, the history of the world of the countries, and their place and significance in the mosaic of the world states (**Sander, 1992:17**).

In fact, we can understand the foreign policy graph of a country, by looking at its domestic policy graph. For example, we cannot understand the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, without knowing "*socialism*", or the dynamics of Greek foreign policy, without knowing "*megalo idea*". Otherwise, what we know will be on the surface.

### II. b - Diplomatic History

It is civil history, which is called "*histoire diplomatique*" in French; studies the history of the relations of independent states, which are the main units of the international system with each other (**Sander, 1992:17**).

The word "*system*" expresses the body, which can have the ability to move together since the parts it is composed of depend on each other (**Gönlübol, 1979:29**). Therefore, in international relations, the units which form this system is tied each other loosely or tightly. They show either a stable or an unstable condition. In fact, diplomatic history is the history of diplomacy.

Political history, in application, has been studied in the meaning of both political history and diplomatic history. Diplomacy, which means the art of the management of international relations by means of peaceful ways forms a body with foreign policy. It is impossible to separate the parts of a body from each other (**Tuncer, 1995:11**). In other words, foreign policy shows the basic way, which a country will follow in international

relations. Diplomacy consists of the means for foreign policy, the methods and all the practical precautions.

The formation of the word “*diplomacy*”, however, is new, we can emphasize that its formation as an institute goes back to the beginning of the civilization. The primitive tribes stopped the war among them. Moreover, in order to negotiate and solve the problems, they sent people whose mission was like today’s “*ambassador*”. They had the special powers and their job was composed of the problems, such as signing the border agreements, establishing hunting fields, arranging marriages between tribes, and so on (Tuncer, 1995:14).

### **Conclusion**

Political history, mentioning the formation, the change, the development, the fall of countries that are the actors of the international system and the political and, to some extent, economic relations between countries is one of the basic disciplines of international relations. As mentioned before, that is the reason why, in the West, political history was defined as the history of international relations.

Being relevant to the issue, one can say that even though every university has different curricula at their international relations departments, the main support of the doctrine is political history since one must know political history to understand the present situation of the countries that are the actors of international system, to interpret it and to be able to predict the future. Furthermore, in order to make the country produce alternative policies for the future, one of the most significant supporting point is the knowledge of political history since it is inevitable for the countries that do not know the past of the state and the system to be trapped by the other countries. The past is the mirror of the future. The countries always need the political historians who know the problems of the country and can produce solutions to these problems. In particular, statesmen and diplomats must know political history sufficiently. It is possible to see it in the advertisements of the government official and administrative personnel examinations prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the most “*distinguished*” ministry.

Our country needs the political historians who know the problems of the country and are able to solve these problems, taking lessons from the past.

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