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CENTRALIZATION DURING THE ERA OF MAHMUD II

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A. Introduction

History of modernization in Turkey dates back to the 18th century. Military defeats against the European powers one after another increasingly urged the ruling elite of a need to reform in the European ways. The reform debates were focused on the modernization of the army, mainly the Janissary corps. In time, the necessity of bringing European technology, innovations and new military tactics and systems came to be accepted widely, but the Janissaries. The reaction of the Janissaries against modernization and discipline turned out to be an acute obstacle to the progress of the whole country at first, and to the survival of the empire later on. Since the power of the army in a state means the power of the state, the weakness and worsening discipline in the Janissary corps meant the decline of the empire as a whole, and the weakness of the Sultan and the central authority in particular. At the same time, continuous revolts of the Janissaries, who were named as the "Sultan's slaves" and thus were supposed to be the most loyal to the Sultan, incessantly scared and wearied the rulers. This image of the Janissary army resulted in the development of the idea of its abolishment and replacement with a new one.

This paper endeavors to show how Mahmud II used centralization in the abolishment of the old Ottoman army and the establishment of the new army and how the reformist civil bureaucracy, which paved the way to the Tanzimat period was strengthened with the reforms. Sultan Selim III, Mahmud II's predecessor, during his 16-year rule devoted his power to the healthy development of a new army to replace the Janissaries. However, his aims would

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be realized by Mahmud II, who learned from the experiences of Selim III very well, and who was patient enough to wait until the right time to abolish the army.

Mahmud II was able to abolish the Janissaries thanks to his success in centralization. The beginning of his reign witnessed an agreement with the local nobles, which some historians accepted as a concession of the central authority to the periphery. Mahmud II in time managed to reduce the power of the nobles, which thus increased the power of the center. He also manipulated the court politics so as to gain enough institutional power against the army. He pioneered the reform issues and appointed reformists in key positions in the administrative body and in the army. At the same time, against the army, he gained the support of the religious class, which constituted the strongest administrative body at the time and which was the second most conservative institution after the Janissaries. Besides, he raised modern military units, loyal to the Sultan and trained them in European ways. These units were within the existing army, so as not to cause any reaction from the Janissaries, and they would be used in the abolishment of the Janissaries.

Having succeeded in the abolishment of the army in 1826, Mahmud II mainly dealt with the establishment of the new army, and introduction of new reforms in various areas. In this period, he indirectly reduced the power of the religious class, which was still influential among the people through its role in education and religious facilities. Reshaping the administrative structure, he collected the power in his hands, but at the same time strengthened the civil bureaucracy at the expense of the religious class. Creation of various ministries, offices, and foreign embassies expanded and thus reinforced the civil bureaucracy. At this time, he appointed the most western-oriented and reformist-minded officials to the civil service. This reformist elite would expand in time, reach their climax during Tanzimat and be the dominant leading group until the end of the Empire, except for Abdulhamid II's reign.

This period has a key role in the transformation from a conservative-dominated administration to a reformist-dominated one. The rise and expansion of the reformist and more secular elite (basically in the civil service) first created Tanzimat and then formed the basis for the new Turkish Republic. So understanding the developments in this period is key to assess the later periods including Atatürk's reforms and the military coups throughout the Turkish history.

B. Kabakçiođlu Mustafa Revolt and Enthronement of Sultan Mahmud II

Sultan Selim III had learned from the Sultan Osman II's failed attempt to abolish the Janissaries with one strike. As soon as he became the sultan in 1791, Selim III created a new army, which would be an alternative to the Janissaries and replace it in the future. However, the establishment of the Nizam-ı Cedid (New Order) army created strong reaction mostly among the Janissaries who foresaw Selim III's plans. In 1805, rebelling Janissary regiments in Rumelia defeated the Nizam-ı Cedid army, which Selim III sent against them from Anatolia. Sultan Selim III had to give in to the Janissaries and set back the reforms. The Nizam-ı Cedid army continued its existence until a harsher Janissary revolt. In May 1807, Selim III ordered the Yamaks (auxiliary levies) to put on European-style uniforms, and the following mutiny led by Kabakçiođlu Mustafa brought an end to the lives of seventeen highest officers, to the Nizam-ı Cedid army and eventually to the reign of Selim III. Mustafa IV was enthroned and the mutineers selected the Grand Vezir. However a reformist ayan (local notable), Alemdar Mustafa Paşa, interfered in the developments and brought his army to Istanbul to rescue Selim III and restore his reforms. He was successful against the Janissaries, but it was too late to save Selim, since Mustafa IV ordered the assassination of Selim III. Alemdar imprisoned Mustafa IV and enthroned Mahmud II who had escaped the assassination attempt on the orders of Mustafa IV by hiding in women clothes. Between July and November 1808, the real ruler was Alemdar Mustafa Paşa, who became the Grand Vezir in return for bringing Mahmud II to power.

Alemdar, in his short dominance in state affairs, mainly dealt with the Janissaries and ordered several reforms and regulations. The Janissaries did not welcome these regulations and in November 1808 he was killed in another Janissary uprising. Mustafa IV, the previous Sultan, was assassinated to prevent the rebels to enthrone him and the only successor of the Ottoman dynasty remained Mahmud II. The fact that there were no other alternatives to the throne played a significant role in Mahmud's success against the Janissaries, beside his armed reaction and thriving stand against them.

The key issue to mention at this point is that Mahmud II gained an invaluable experience in this period of his reign characterized by Alemdar's

dominance. Owing to this experience he, already a reform-minded ruler, would follow his predecessor, Selim III, but would not repeat the mistakes he did. The first way in which he gained experience was through Selim III's personal advises to him. Sharing the palace imprisonment after the Kabakçioğlu Revolt, at a time when he could assess how and why his reforms failed, Selim III obviously told Mahmud II very helpful points about how to perform and realize reforms in the contemporary political environment.

Another way in which Mahmud II gained experience was through his personal observations. During the Kabakçioğlu Mustafa revolt he saw that giving in to the mutineers did not save Selim III, and thus Mahmud II carried out armed resistance against the rebels in the revolt, which ended in the death of Alemdar. In this resistance he used the Sekban-ı Cedit regiments (which were established by Alemdar as a continuation of the Nizam-ı Cedit) to defend the palace, and the navy to bomb the Janissary barracks.¹ Thus he practiced a fight against the Janissaries before his later and last strike in 1826, and learned how to carry out such an attack against the Janissaries to gain a full victory over them.

Besides, during the destruction of the Nizam-ı Cedit and later of the Sekban-ı Cedit, he saw how creating new and modern regiments caused the Janissary uprisings and thus failed. So he would pursue a slightly different strategy in preparing his military support against the Janissaries, as will be discussed later.

Another experience of Sultan Mahmud was that the dominance of Alemdar in this period ended in a revolt. That is, the dominance of someone in the palace other than the Sultan resulted in a revolt. Thus, a way to prevent revolts would be to acquire power in the Sultan's, i.e. his own, hands. This observation certainly strengthened his tendency to acquire power in his hand and practice modernization through a centralized authority.

Consequently, as a result of his early experiences, he understood that to pursue his reforms, which would cover the entire scope of the Ottoman institutions and society, he had to dispose of the Janissaries and to reach this

1 A detailed description of the fights between the Sekban-ı Cedit regiments and the Janissaries can be found in Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Tarih-i Cevdet* (Istanbul: Üçdal N., 1974), v. 9, pp. 25-50.

aim he had to accumulate the power to the center and get the support of other institutions.

Sened-i İttifak (Pledge of Alliance)

Another significant instance of the Alemdar Mustafa Paşa period is the Sened-i İttifak. The ayan had gained increasingly greater power in their localities. Some became so strong that they would later on resist the Sultan's orders, fight against the Sultan's army and defeat it. Alemdar, himself a former ayan in Rusçuk, aimed to bring the rising tension between the center and the ayan to some kind of a solution. He called the ayan to Istanbul and prepared this document to be signed by the ayan and the Sultan.

There is no agreement among the historians on the aims and implications of the Sened-i İttifak. Some argue that it was an endeavor to centralize the state and to assure the obedience of the ayan to the Sultan and to the state, and thus the pact was a step toward the transformation of the Ottoman empire into a modern centralized state.² Some others believe that it included concessions from the Sultan to the ayan, thus it was an indication of the ayan dominance in the Ottoman rule through Alemdar. They contended that by the Sened-i İttifak, ayans secured their hegemonies and legalized the dynastic structure that already emerged in the localities. So it was a traditionalist step forced by the ayan.³

Analyzing the articles of the document, it is hard to find a clear answer to the question whether the pact was a concession of the Sultan to the ayan or ayan's pledge of obedience to the Sultan. There is evidence to support both arguments. In the document, ayan confirmed loyalty to the Sultan and recognition of the Grand Vezir as his absolute representative (articles 1 and 4). They promised to supply armies and to cooperate in the recruitment of new regiments whenever needed (article 2), and they were to rule justly in their territories (article 5). They also promised to support the Sultan's reforms and fight against any uprising against the Sultan and his reforms (article 6). On the other hand, the Sultan promised to levy taxes fairly and justly, and to recognize and protect the dynasties (articles 7 and 5). Moreover, ayan were given the right

2 Ibid. p. 6, and Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of the Young Ottoman Thought*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962) p. 148.

3 Halil İnalcık, "Sened-i İttifak ve Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu" *Belleten*, XXVIII (1964), p. 608.

to interfere altogether if the Grand Vezir committed illegal acts or misused his absolute authority (article 5).⁴ As it may be observed in this presentation of articles, both sides had to make reciprocal concessions and the terms were heavy both for the Sultan and the ayan. This conclusion explains why the Sultan sealed reluctantly⁵ and why only four of the participant ayan signed the document. Ayan did not have to make any concessions for something, which they already possessed, and the Sultan was not willing to make concessions for something, which ayan were already supposed to do.

The Sened-i İttifak, though a significant indicator of the characteristics of the time period and of the relations between the ayan and the Sultan, has no direct long-term results. However, the ayan's power to ask for concessions invoked the Sultan's reaction. It certainly added to Mahmud II's decisiveness to overcome the other centers of power and his commitment to establish a modern centralized state.

C. Centralization

Ayan

In order to centralize the state, Mahmud II had to deal with various centers of power. Ayan's power had to be reduced to gain full control all over the country. In the Balkan's, when possible, the ayan were reduced by peaceful means. When an ayan died, his position was not assigned to his heirs, but to new officials from Istanbul, and his heirs were appointed to elsewhere in the empire. In this way, dynasties lost their local power, and central authority was strengthened. By such methods Thrace, Macedonia, the Danubian shores, and much of Wallachia were put under direct control of the Sultan between 1814 and 1820.⁶ Armed forces were used whenever these measures failed. The best-known example of use of force against an ayan is the case of Ali Paşa of Janina. He could only be dismissed after a long siege of Janina (August 1820-January 1822). At the same time, the Anatolian ayan were also put down using the same tactics, which worked well in the Balkans. The governor of Trabzon eliminated

4 Cevdet, pp. 314-324.

5 There is a debate on whether the Sultan signed or not.

6 Stanford Shaw and Ezel K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), v.2, p.14.

the principal ayan along the Black Sea in 1812 and 1813. Çapanoğlu Süleyman Bey's death in 1814 caused the division of his dynasty and other local governors occupied his region in the mean time, thus weakening another peripheral power. The death of another strong ayan, Karaosmanoğlu Hüseyin Ağa, in 1816, had the similar result. So by the end of 1817, the Sultan's direct authority in Anatolia was much strengthened.⁷

Court Politics

While increasing the central power by weakening the ayan, Mahmud II also manipulated court politics to increase his personal authority. One strategy of effective leadership to acquire authoritative power in the leader's hand is to change the positions of the officials frequently, so that they will not build bases of support within their units of responsibility. A second way is to raise one's own protégés upwards in the ranks and in time place them in key positions. Mahmud II used both methods excellently to secure his authority and further centralization. He perfectly used the struggle for power among the administrative units for this aim. An example of how Mahmud II manipulated court politics for centralization is Mehmet Sait Halet Efendi's appointment and dismissal. Although he was a conservative, Halet Efendi became a close military and political advisor of Mahmud II. Despite his opposition to all kinds of reforms and modernization attempts, Mahmud II kept him close for his harsh stance against the ayan. Halet Efendi played an active role in the campaigns against the ayan and in centralizing the state. However, when he himself gained too much power through his connections among the Janissaries and by placing his favorites in the government, he was dismissed, exiled and then strangled (November 1822). Halet Efendi was replaced by one of his rivals, Deli Abdullah Paşa, with the special task of rooting Halet Efendi's favorites out of government. When he completed his mission in five months, Abdullah Paşa was also replaced by Silahtar Ali Paşa, who would serve the Sultan's interests by placing loyal men into the ranks of Janissary corps. Galip Paşa, a liberal reformist of his time, would follow him until he left his place to Benderli Selim Mehmet Paşa (September 1824-1828).⁸

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.* pp.8-9. A detailed account on the court politics and how these frequent replacements took place is presented in *Tarih-i Cevdet*, v.11 and 12.

These frequent changes added to Sultan Mahmud II's power in several ways. First, in this way he prevented any other official from becoming strong enough to oppose against the Sultan's reforms, and basically against his idea to abolish the Janissary corps. Secondly, a new appointed official would do his best to place Sultan's favorites in various key positions, especially in the Janissary ranks. In this way reformists replaced conservatives whenever possible. Besides, Mahmud II, in this way, could choose the best personalities to serve his ideas of reform.

Ulema

Another significant aspect of Mahmud II's centralization is how he handled ulema (the religious class). Ulema, like the Janissaries, was traditionally against reforms. Together with its command of education, ulema had an impact on the population through the preachers in the central mosques. Thus, ulema's support was essential in any major act and action. It was the ulema, who secured the public support on Janissaries' side in the Kabakçioğlu Mustafa revolt against the Nizam-ı Cedid of Selim III.⁹ Uriel Heyd makes a distinction between the aristocratic ulema and the lower-class ulema.¹⁰ Avigdor Levy, following Heyd's distinction, argues that especially the lower-class ulema had the direct contact with the masses, and that is why it was more critical to gain the support of the lower-class ulema.¹¹ Levy then describes how Mahmud II endeavored to win the lower-class ulema as well as appointing reformists to the ulema leadership:

By means of this rigorous appointments policy, for which the main criterion was the ability to carry out the Sultan's programmes, Mahmud II managed to command a high degree of obedience from the ulema leadership.

At the same time the Sultan also tried to win the good opinion of the ulema of all ranks by a policy of clever appeasement. He regularly attended religious ceremonies and public prayers, built mosques and founded religious trusts

9 For a detailed account on how Janissary and ulema collaboration dethroned Selim III, and later on how Janissaries were influential in appointment of the new şeyhülislam (the head of ulema), see Cevdet, v. 8, pp. 214-273.

10 Uriel Heyd, "The Ottoman Ulema and Westernization in the Time of Selim III and Mahmud II," *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, v. 9, (1961), p.78.

11 A. Levy, "The Ottoman Ulema and the Military Reforms," *Asian and African Studies*, v. 7 (1971), p. 14. Also see: Shaw, p. 19.

(evkaf). In 1824, in order to gain the support of all the ulema, he issued a decree forbidding parents to withdraw their sons from the elementary religious schools (mekteb) before they had acquired the necessary proficiency in the principles of Islam.¹²

It may be a too pragmatic and materialistic approach to attach Mahmud II's all religious deeds to his aim at gaining the lower-rank ulema's support. However, it is certain that such acts helped him gain a positive image and credit among the entire ulema as well as the people.

Thus, Mahmud II, before directly facing the Janissaries, gathered the full authority and power in his hands, through his clever policies against the ayan, over the court officials and among the ulema.

D. Vaka-yı Hayriyye (Auspicious Event)

Background

His experience in the Kabakçıoğlu Mustafa revolt taught Mahmud II that he needed loyal corps to fight against Janissaries, beyond the bureaucratic and popular support. After the disbanding of the Sekbans, Mahmut resorted to a way, which would not disturb the Janissaries and make them revolt again. Instead of creating new regiments, he aimed at gaining the loyalty of certain corps among the existing ones. Thus he paid a special attention to the Cannon and allied Cannon-Wagon corps. First, he appointed loyal officers at the head of these corps and then in time, increased their training and discipline, and reinforced them with extra payments, increased salaries, provided them with new equipment and doubled their numbers.¹³ These measures increased the status of these corps in the army, and thus increased their loyalty to the Sultan. Using such measures, by 1826, Mahmud II gained loyalty of Humbaracı (Bombardiers), Arabacı (Cannon-Wagon), Lağımçı (Miners), Topçu (Artillery) and Tersane (Dockyard) corps. Together with the armed support, Mahmud II was ready to confront and defeat the Janissaries in case of a revolt. The Eşkençi Project would be the reason for the Janissaries to revolt.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 17.

¹³ While originally these two corps amounted to approximately six thousand men, by 1826 their number reached to 14.400. See: Shaw, p.6.

The Eşkenci Project

In 1926, for several months Mahmud II held secret meetings with his top officials. The main discussion held in these meetings was how to modernize the Ottoman army. They decided to establish modernized and disciplined corps out of Janissaries under an old Janissary label, i.e. the Eşkencis (active Janissaries). The ablest 150 men from each of the 51 Janissary corps in Istanbul would be trained only one day separate from the Janissaries, and in the remaining days of the week they would train with the other Janissaries, they would live in the Janissary barracks and commanded by the Janissary officers. However, to attract the best soldiers, they would be paid more.¹⁴

Avigdor Levy argues that The Eşkenci Project was a part of Mahmud II's master plan to gradually transform the Janissaries into a modern army (instead of destroying them).¹⁵ However, considering Mahmud II's past two experiences in which Janissaries revolted against separately trained and modernized units, it is hard to agree with Levy. Mahmud II, during the period between 1808-1826, sought for increasing his power and gathering enough military, institutional and popular support against the Janissaries as a preparation for a confrontation with them. He attempted to establish the Eşkenci units only when he felt himself strong enough to defeat the Janissaries in a most possible armed conflict as a result of the new formation.

The plan was announced carefully and cautiously to avoid a direct opposition from the Janissaries. Firstly, the high rank generals were told and their approval and support was secured. Then in front of a broader council composed of lower officials from the army and ulema, the Grand Vezir and şeyhulislam made speeches and convinced the participants of the necessity of reforms in the army and of establishment of new, modern and disciplined units. Then the decree of the Sultan was declared and everybody was asked to agree with it. There seemed to be no reaction, moreover an essential and strong support from the ranks of ulema.¹⁶ Only after all these approvals and support the reform plan would be announced to the Janissaries. However, the Janissary

14 Cevdet, v. 12, p. 192.

15 A. Levy, "The Eşkenci Project" *Abr Nahrain*, v. 14 (1973-1974), p. 39.

16 *Ibid*, pp. 191-193; Shaw, p.19.

reaction would grow and turn into an uprising only two days after the Eşkencis had begun to train.

The Janissary Revolt and Vaka-yı Hayriyye

The Janissaries overturned their cauldrons (typical Janissary way to start a revolt) and began to revolt on the night of June 14. Thousands of Janissaries began gathering at the Et Meydanı, where generally the revolts started. However, the plans to counter a Janissary revolt were already made on the side of the Palace. The Grand Vezir, Benderli Selim Mehmet Paşa, as soon as he heard that Janissaries revolted, called the loyal corps to the Topkapı Palace. Topçu, Humbaracı, Lağımcı and Tersane were soon ready to fight. At the same time, the two Guards of the two sides of the Bosphorous, Ağa Hüseyin Paşa and Mehmet İzzet Paşa, were ordered to bring their troops with ships down to the Yalı Köşk. The troops of guardsmen amounted to 3.000 and their shipping was planned beforehand.¹⁷

Ulema's material and moral support was considerable. All the lower-rank ulema, together with the students of medreses came to the Topkapı Palace to fight against the Janissaries. They added up to 3.500. Moreover, their announcements in the streets of Istanbul, and the preachers' propaganda to encourage the people to take place on the Sultan's side resulted in an enormous popular support.¹⁸ Besides, ulema's obvious and decided cooperation with the Sultan made his righteousness indisputable. The standard of the Prophet was unfurled and this added a sense of "holy war" in the fighting. To see the strong ulema backing and the standard of the Prophet had a strong impact in the dissolution of the Janissaries and prevented them from a strong attack on the Topkapı Palace.¹⁹

In several hours the Janissaries were put under siege in their barracks at Et Meydanı, and it was not difficult for the artillery to break down the barrack gates and gave the way to the troops to move in the barracks and slaughter the rebels.

17 Cevdet, v. 12, p. 200.

18 *Ibid*, p.207.

19 A janissary described Ahmed Cevdet Paşa how the Janissaries' plan to attack to the Palace before the troops of the guardsmen arrived was overturned and how they were paralyzed with fear when they saw the ulema and the standard of the Prophet. See: *Ibid*, p. 209.

The barracks were set on fire and many Janissaries perished in the fire.²⁰ There was no more resistance and the remaining Janissaries scattered around were found and executed on the spot (June 15, 1826). The Janissary corps was officially abolished the next day. Bektaşî order, which was associated with the Janissaries, was also abolished, some of its leaders were executed, and its property was distributed to the other sects.²¹ The active groups and officials during the abolishment were promoted or bestowed generous gifts.²²

Consequently, thanks to Mahmud II's successful centralization policy, the Janissary corps and its allies were abolished. This event took its place in the Turkish history as Vaka-yı Hayriyye.

E. Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediyye

Centralized Military Structure

The decree, which abolished the Janissaries, also named the new army, the Muallem Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediyye (The Trained Victorious Soldiers of Muhammed), and its first commander was Ağa Hüseyin Paşa, appointed as serasker (chief of the soldiers). The new army was initially composed of 120.000 soldiers, divided into tertips (regiments), and each commanded by a binbaşı (colonel). Promotion was by seniority, though ability would also be considered. An imam was appointed to each company to lead the prayers and teach religious principles. Salaries were considerably high to attract the most able men.²³ On May 1827, Mehmet Hüsrev Paşa replaced Ağa Hüseyin Paşa, who was not open enough to new ideas and techniques.

Hüsrev Paşa introduced some features of the French army system. Basic unit became the tabur (battalion), which was made up of eight bölüks (musket companies). Three bölüks made an alay (regiment), which was commanded by a miralay (colonel). Soon, there were some 27,000 soldiers in this system. The

20 Official historian Esat Efendi noted that a total of 6.000 Janissaries were killed, and Cevdet Paşa added that more than 20.000 were exiled out of Istanbul during Vaka-yı Hayriyye. Cevdet, p. 234.

21 Cevdet, pp. 235-242.

22 *Ibid*, pp. 220-221.

23 Shaw, p. 24.

officers were mostly consisted of Hüsrev Paşa's slaves.²⁴ Bostancı corps was reorganized into Muallem Bostancı-yı Hassa (Trained Imperial Gardeners). A new western-style cavalry regiment was formed in Silistria, on Danube. By February 1827, another cavalry regiment was also established in Istanbul.²⁵

Mahmud II's aim was to bring all the independent corps under one army structure, namely under the Mansure. The cavalry units, both in Istanbul and in Silistria were attached to the Mansure. He also attached the artillery units, which had an active role during the Vaka-yı Hayriyye, to the Mansury army. Besides, Mahmud II appointed a protégé of Hüsrev Paşa, Topal İzzet Paşa, as Grand Admiral. The serasker's power was further increased by several changes in the seyfiyye (military) structure. For instance the office of superintendent was canceled. Moreover, Hüsrev Paşa's protégés rose very quickly in the ranks of the Mansure army. Levy estimates that between seventy and eighty of Hüsrev Paşa's slaves attained the highest ranks in the army.²⁶ The military centralization was complete when in March 1838 all the independent fighting corps were incorporated into Mansure army and while still some other independent facilities were grouped into three departments under serasker's control: Hassa (The Imperial Guards), Tophane (The Ordinance Department) and Mühimmat-ı Harbiye (The Department of War Supplies).²⁷

Redif

After the abolishment of the tımar system in 1831, another military reform, which can also be assessed as a step towards centralization, was the establishment of redif (reserve militia) corps, from 1834 on. In the redif system, men in the provinces would be screened and trained beforehand, so that only those trained and ready units would be called and sent to the front in times of war. Redif battalions were established in almost every province. The system rapidly spread and developed. While, in 1834, there were 40 battalions with

24 *Ibid*, p. 25. For the significant positions that were held by Hüsrev Paşa's slaves, see: A. Levy, "The Officer Corps in Sultan Mahmud II's New Ottoman Army, 1826-39, " *IJMES* 2 (1971), pp. 21-39.

25 Shaw, p. 24.

26 Levy, "Sultan Mahmud II's New Ottoman Army, " p. 29. Although the appointment of these slaves increased the central authority, it also increased favoritism in the military ranks, which negatively affected the low-rank officers' enthusiasm.

27 Shaw, p. 41.

some 57,000 soldiers, in September 1836, there were about 100,000 men in 120 battalions.²⁸ Although at first, these battalions were commanded by the ayan, later on officials were sent from the center to train and command the regiments, under which the battalions were gathered. Consequently, the way in which redif was organized and developed was a restriction on the authorities of the ayan, and was a step towards increasing the central power over the local authorities.

Education and the Role of the Ulema

Thanks to the loyalty of the religious elite to the Sultan and the concessions to the lower rank ulema, the military reforms did not meet much opposition from the ulema. Together with the establishment of the Mansure regiments, one imam per company was appointed.²⁹ In another instance in May 1827, Mahmud II agreed to appoint three preachers to the three central barracks in return for ulema's approval to the change of the headgear of the soldiers to fez.

Mahmud II also wanted to establish and expand higher technical military schools, and the approval of the ulema for these schools was generally secured by appointment of müderris (a professor in a medrese) as teachers in these schools. Mahmud II established several medical schools: Tıbhane-i Amire (Army Medical School), Cerrahhane (School of Surgery) and Mekteb-i Şahane-i Tıbbiye (Imperial School of Medicine). Besides, Müzik-i Hümayun Mektebi (Imperial School of Music) was established in 1836.³⁰ At the same time Mahmud II endeavored to revive the Mühendishane-i Berr-i Hümayun (Army Engineering School) and Mühendishane-i Bahr-i Hümayun (Naval Engineering School). However, the dominance of conservative ulema in the structure of these schools limited the success of the reformist attempts.³¹

Mahmud II's first attempt to raise officers for the Mansure army was the establishment of Enderun-u Hümayun Ağavâtı Ocağı, (Corps of Ağa's of the Imperial Palace Service) shortly after the abolishment of the Janissaries.

28 *Ibid*, pp. 43-44.

29 A. Levy, "The Ottoman Ulema and the Military Reforms of Sultan Mahmud II," *Asian and African Studies*, 7 (1971), p. 24.

30 Shaw, p. 48.

31 Hoca İshak Efendi, who was a Jew-born Muslim-convert reformist, could stand as the principle of the Mühendishane-i Berr-i Hümayun only for about a year, and was succeeded by his predecessor, Seyit Ali Efendi, who was a conservative müderris.

Although Mahmud II was very enthusiastic about this corps and personally participated in the training of the soldiers, the discipline and expertise could not be maintained and it had to be abolished in May 1830.³² In 1834, Mehmet Namık Paşa proposed the establishment of a modern officers' school on the French model.³³ He was able to convince the Sultan and then overcome the opposition, and Mekteb-i Ulum-u Hayriyye (School of Military Sciences) was established in 1834. However, the dominance of ulema among the instructors was inescapable. In 1837, for instance, out of the eleven teaching staff, ten were ulema. The French military attaché, Captain Anselme, who visited the school in the summer of 1838, described the prospects of the school in the following way:

The military school as much as it is insignificant at the present, must be considered as great step at the regeneration of the empire and the achievement of something of value. The young men learn, at least to read and write, a little geography, history and arithmetic.

...But religious fanaticism is still too strong to hope for a modification of conditions in a long time to come.³⁴

Mahmud II's efforts to establish an educational system apart from the traditional medrese structure is much apparent in the plans for the establishment of secular rüşdiye schools (for adolescents) for the graduates of primary schools who did not wish to continue with medrese. Mahmud II's plan would be realized in 1840, a year after his death. However, he was able to establish two other schools in 1838: Mekteb-i Maarif-i Adliye (School of Education of the Sultan), and Mekteb-i Maarif-i Edebiyye (School of literary Education), which aimed a secular education.³⁵

Although these schools were far below the level of modern education that they were expected to reach, they constituted the seeds of the secular and

32 Shaw, p. 29; Levy, "Sultan Mahmud II's New Ottoman Army," p. 27.

33 Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1968) p. 84. Although Lewis argues that in *Tibhane-i Amire* and *Mekteb-i Ulum-u Harbiye*, foreign instructors (mainly French) played a significant role, it is not until the Tanzimat period that European teachers would sustain the majority in these schools.

34 Archives de la Guerre, Paris, MR 1619, p. 69, piece 39, quoted in Levy, "The Officer Corps in Sultan Mahmud II's New Ottoman Army, 1826-39", p. 36.

35 Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964) p. 112.

modern education.³⁶ The employment of European teachers, and the spread of such secular (both military and civil) schools would take place only after Mahmud II's death, during the Tanzimat period. Mahmud II, by establishing these schools and sending students to Europe beginning from 1827, was paving the way for the future civil and military reformist intellectuals of the Turkish elite.

F. Bureaucratization

Mahmud II, as a part of his centralization policy, made serious changes in the structure of the central government. He basically reorganized the scribes and administrators in the palace and in the Sublime Porte. As a result of the increasing need for specialization, he divided the central government into ministries. Several old units were transformed into ministries. Saadet kethüdası (lieutenant of the grand vezir) became the Dahiliye Nazırı (Minister of the Interior). In 1836 the office of reisul kütta became the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Besides, Nezaret-i Adliye (Ministry of Justice) and Nezaret-i Umur-u Maliye (Ministry of Finance) were established. Finally, in 1838, the grand vezir was no more the absolute lieutenant of the sultan, and his title was transformed into Baş Vekil (prime minister).³⁷ Thus, a cabinet was formed, composed of the ministers and led by the prime minister, to discuss the executive matters of the government. In order to consider every proposal in detail, three councils were established in 1838, at the recommendation of Mustafa Reşit Paşa. Meclis-i Vala-yı Ahkam-ı Adliye (The Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances) would discuss the tanzimat-ı hayriyye (beneficent reorderings), the principles of the later Tanzimat. The other two councils were Dar-ı Şura-yı Bab-ı Ali (the Deliberative Council of the Sublime Porte) and Dar-ı Şura-yı Askeri (the Deliberative Council of the Army).³⁸

At the same time, the reforms in the education system left the Tercüme Odası (Translation Office) as the only educational apparatus of the scribal system. This office, which was established first in the Foreign Ministry in 1833, became the source of the new intelligentsia. Mustafa Reşit Paşa, Ali Paşa and

36 *Ibid.*

37 Shaw, pp. 36-37.

38 *Ibid.*

Fuad Paşa, who would be the main actors of the Tanzimat period, served in the Tercüme Odası as a part of their education in the bureaucracy.³⁹

The reestablishment of permanent embassies is another factor, which strengthened the civil bureaucracy. In 1834, Mahmud II assigned Mustafa Reşit Bey (Paşa after 1838) to Paris. The staff of the Tercüme Odası would generally be appointed to the embassies, and then when they returned, they constituted the modernizing elite of the state. Mahmud II, understanding the prospective significance of the Tercüme Odası and its staff, strengthened and expanded the office. Besides, in 1836 he established the Hariciye Nezareti (Foreign Ministry).⁴⁰ Through this bureaucratic body, a new young elite of diplomats would rise in the ranks up to the court.

This system would provide Mahmud II with the most reform-minded people, who would combine the necessities of the empire, the evaluations of the foreign diplomats and their own ideas.⁴¹ Indeed, most reformist men would rise along this civil bureaucratic line that Mahmud II established. Mustafa Reşit Paşa was the most prominent example. During his first service as the Hariciye Nazırı, he was as much influential on the Sultan as a grand vezir.⁴² Thus Sultan Mahmud II's centralizing reforms in the civil bureaucracy began to give its fruits even before his death. It would reach its peak during the Tanzimat period, when civil bureaucrats were the real rulers of the empire.

G. Conclusion

Using his long reign efficiently against any other center of power, Mahmud II successfully modernized the Ottoman Empire, by transforming it into a centralized and reform-oriented state. The Janissaries had become a social class, which engaged in trade etc. This brought the elimination of the Janissaries. The abolishment of the Janissary corps was also a step in Mahmud II's plans for acquiring complete authoritative power. Although some of the ayans did

39 *Ibid*, pp. 37-39.

40 Carter Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) p. 136.

41 İlber Ortaylı, "Tanzimat Bürokratları ve Metternich" *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda İktisadi ve Sosyal Değişim*, (Ankara: Turhan, 2000), p. 443.

42 Reşat Kaynar, *Mustafa Reşit Paşa ve Tanzimat*, (Ankara: TTK, 1991), pp. 105-112.

accomplish modernization in their localities, for Mahmud II they were all obstacles to his rule over the people. So they were also eliminated.

Indeed, Mahmud II was the first Sultan to attain direct personal rule. The state had always been personified in Sultan's personality. However, other administrative institutions all the time existed to control Sultan's deeds. Mahmud II gained so much power that no other institution could restrict his personal authority. In this sense Mahmud II was the first among the Ottoman sultans.

After gaining enough power to go on with any reform, Mahmud II increased the structural power of the military and the civil bureaucracy. By setting apart the educational roots of these two institutions from the traditional medrese system, he sowed the seeds of the reformist, secular elite both within the military and in the civil bureaucracy.

It is necessary to keep in mind that Mahmud II's each and every reform served his centralization policy. Each new, reformed institution added to his personal authority. Berkes admires Mahmud II as a true reformer, because Mahmud II had a state project in his mind. Establishment of cabinet-like institutions and rise of a new, open-minded intelligentsia were parts of Mahmud II's state project, which factually entailed further centralization and eventually the absolute personal power of the Sultan. Especially the abolishment of the office of Grand Vezir, and pushing the Şeyh-ul İslam office out of the scope of reform activity left the Sultan's personality as the only dominant power in conduct of the state.

Tanzimat was a natural result of Mahmud II's policies, just as the Young Turks. Mahmud II, as a result of his centralized state philosophy, transferred the power, in order to reform and improve the state and the people, from the Sultan to a handful of progressive elite, and this elite has hold that power until today.

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