The Ottoman Way of Governing Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious Communities

Osmanlının Çoklu Etnik ve Dini Toplumları Yönetme Metodu

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Abstract

Although ruling over multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities for many centuries in some of the most troubled regions in the world was not an easy task, the Ottoman Turks had pretty much succeeded in doing this. For this, the administrative methods of the Ottomans were allowed to be shaped by geographic, ethnic, religious and cultural environments and needs. Even though the Ottoman Turks strictly adhered to the Islamic laws, they did not hesitate to introduce new laws shaped by a long Turkish history and tradition to create better opportunities to both the ruler and the ruled. Despite some shortcomings, the Ottoman ruling practices had its merit in dealing with mixed communities quite different from each other. Until the modern times, the Ottoman administration was understandable and acceptable to the whole subjects. In the modern times, because of the rise of Europe in political, military, economic and cultural matters, the minorities in the Empire increasingly became dissatisfied with their conditions and demanded new reforms and rebelled against the state for separation. In this stage, though the Ottoman administration tried to satisfy the whole subjects by introducing new reforms, it failed to hold its subjects and territories intact because of great obstacles.

Key Words: The Ottoman Governance, Minorities, Non-Muslims, *Millet*, the Balkans, the Turks.

Özet

Asırlarca dünyanın en zorlu bölgelerinde yaşayan çok dinli ve etnik yapılı toplumları yönetmek kolay bir iş olmasa da, bunu Osmanlı Türkleri büyük ölçüde başarmıştır. Bunun için Osmanlılar ortaya koydukları yönetim şeklini dinî, kültürel, etnik ve coğrafik ortama uydurmuşlardır. İslâm kanunlarına sıkı bağlı olmalarına rağmen, Türkler hem yönetici ve hem de yönetilen için olanaklar sunan ve uzun Türk tarih ve geleneğin ürünü olan yeni kanunları kullanmaktan geri kalmamışlardır. Birbirinden

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oldukça farklı toplumları yönetmede, bazı aksaklıklar görülse de, Osmanlı yönetim anlayışı kendi değerini içerisinde taşımıştır. Modern zamanlara kadar Osmanlı idaresi her kesim için anlaşılır ve kabul edilir bir öneme sahip olmuştur. Modern zamanlardaki Avrupa'nın siyasi, askeri, ekonomik ve kültürel yükselişi, Osmanlı Devleti'ni ciddî bir şekilde etkilemiş, bu etkinin sonucu olarak azınlıklar eskiden beri içinde bulundukları şartları kabullenmemeye, yenilikler istemeye, fırsat buldukça da devletten ayrılmak için ayaklanmalara başlamışlardır. Bu aşamada Osmanlı yönetimi reformlar yaparak cazibesini ve varlığını sürdürmek istemişse de karşılaştığı güçlüklerin büyüklüğü nedeniyle tüm tebaayı ve topraklarını bir arada tutma noktasında tam ve istenilen başarıyı elde edememiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler*:* Osmanlı Yönetim Anlayışı, Azınlıklar, Gayri Müslimler, Millet, Balkanlar, Türkler.

Introduction

The Ottoman Empire that was founded at the end of the thirteenth century and collapsed in the first quarter of the twentieth century was one of the longest-lived empires history ever recorded. The Empire's success was not only having one of the longest lives but also governing multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities who lived some of the most troubled regions of the world as far as geographic, cultural, religious and ethnic diversities and conflicts were concerned.

The Ottoman Turks were from Kayı tribe of the Oghuz Turks who very much began to come into Anatolia in the eleventh century as conquerors and state builders. These Turks were perfectly capable of establishing states and running them.

> "While (they were) still nomads in Central Asia, many Turks had regarded themselves as 'a chosen people of God'. Demons in war and angels in peace, equally heroic and humane, they were destined to rule the world."[1]

Furthermore, they believed that they were sent by God to rule the world with wealth and justice.[2]

The Ottoman principality, as one of many Turkish principalities founded after the collapse of the Anatolian Seljuk State in the first half of the thirteenth

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[1] Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453–1924*, London: John Murray, 1995, p. 4.

[2] Yaşar Canatan, Musa Şaşmaz and İlhan Gedik, "Türklerde Devlet Anlayışı," *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları*, 89 (April 1994), s. 44.

century, was established in the north-west Anatolia in 1299 and was reached its largest borders in the mid-seventeenth century. The Ottomans succeeded in founding a big empire because their rule was more acceptable to the whole subjects than most of their contemporary states.

> "The Ottomans' success was their official recognition that the diversity of the territories over which they ruled required the adoption of flexible administrative practices that could accommodate the needs of different religions and different cultures."[3]

Besides showing respect to local customs, the Ottomans did not hesitate to adopt the old ruling practices, which had been performed by the old empires—Rome, Islam, Mongol and Turk—to create more efficient administration.[4]

In the first one and half century, the Ottoman Empire was mainly ruled by the House of Ottoman and by Turkish strong families, such as Chandarli family that raised most of the Ottoman *sadrazams* (grand *vezirs*-today's prime minister) in this period. As the Ottoman State enlarged and became an empire, a strict centralized government was needed to run the empire. Since the Turkish elite families had strong influence in administrative matters, they had powers to affect the Ottoman House, which had caused at weakening of the central government. In order to prevent such weakness, the Ottomans started to rely on *devshirme* (collecting) system[5] that comprised taking of clever and able Christian boys from their families in the Balkans and given them to Turkish families where they learned Islamic religion, Turkish manner, language and culture. After this, they were mostly employed in the army, *the Janissaries*[6] and high places. More clever ones were educated in the palace school, Enderun, and were raised as statesmen and high ranking military and civil servants. After Mehmet II, most of the Ottoman *vezirs*, governors and pashas came from *devshirmes*[7] who

> "… managed the affairs of the empire and led its armies, yet they were all slaves of the sultan. In a sense, of course, the term slave is misleading. These warrior-statesmen acquired vest wealth, wielded immense power, had household slaves of their own, and married women of their own

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[3] William L. Cleveland, *A History of Modern Middle East*, Oxford: Westview Pres, 1994, p.43.

[4] İlber Ortaylı, *Osmanlı Barışı,* İstanbul: Ufuk Kitap, 2003, s. 17.

[5] Emel Topçu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Fatih Dönemi Kamu Yönetimi,* Ankara: Ocak Yayınları, 1993, p, 34.

[6] Cleveland, *ibid.*, p. 47.

[7] İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Vol. 1, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988, p, 510-511; Mansel, *ibid.*, s. 17-18;

choosing. But the power they possessed derived from the will of the sultan; they were his creatures, his bondsmen, and he could dismiss and punish them as he chose."[8]

Unlike the Ummayad Caliphs who had treated the non-Arab Muslims as the second class and as the high tax paying *Mawâlî*, the Ottomans did not insist on "pure Turk" to employ in official posts. Islam and Ottoman Turkish language were cornerstones in achieving higher posts. As long as any person who was a Muslim and knew the "*rich, eloquent and suitable*" Ottoman Turkish language had equal chances to achieve social statues regardless of their religious and ethnic backgrounds.[9] After Sadrazam Chandarli Halil Pasha was dismissed from his post and killed in 1453, in which *devshirme* Zaganos Pasha had played some role, most of the Ottoman *sadrazams* came from the *devshirmes*.[10]

The conquest of Istanbul by Mehmet the Conqueror in 1453 was an important step in becoming a world empire. By this conquest, the Ottoman sultan inherited the long-lived Roman rule and became "king of kings" with the feeling of dominating the whole world.[11] They had lands on three continents—Europe, Asia and Africa—and their empire reached from Vienna in the West to Basra in the East, and from Russia in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south. In these endless territories, they ruled many nations, communities and religious groups. In this, the Ottoman Turks had a great success. Yet, foreign writers had different views about administrative abilities of the Ottoman Turks. These views would be located in somewhere between Salomon Schweigger's and Busbecque's. The first one who was a Protestant priest and visited Istanbul in 1578 claimed that the Ottoman Empire employed both slavery and strict hierarchical administrative cadres in which every one had feared of his life, which forced them to act very carefully and to do every job with utmost care. Busbecque, on the other hand, stressed that jobs in the Ottoman Empire were open to everyone and were performed according to their abilities rather than their bloods derived from hereditary rights.[12]

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[8] Cleveland, *ibid.*, p. 48.

[9] Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, New York: Harper Colophon Boks, 1966, p. 70–71; Lewis, *Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu*, s. 7.

[10] İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Vol. 2, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988, s. 10–11. According to Uzunçarşılı, after Chandarlı Halil's murder, the post of Sadrazam was filled by devshirmes. Until the end of the sixteenth century, four Turkish sadrazams, namely Karamani Mehmet Pasha, Çandarlızade İbrahim Pasha, Piri Mehmet Pasha, and Manisalı Lala Mehmet Pasha, were appointed.

[11] Cemal Kafadar, "The Ottomans and Europe," *Handbook of European History 1400-1600,* volume 1, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994, p. 596; Mansel, *ibid.*, s. 6-7.

[12] İlber Ortaylı, "Avrupalı Seyahatnamelerde Türkiye ve Türkler," *Tarih Boyunca Türklerde İnsani Değerler ve İnsan Hakları: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Dönemi,* İstanbul: Bayrak

After the Ottomans conquered places, they did not make fundamental changes. They showed respect to local customs.

> "As long as taxes were remitted and stability was maintained, the Ottomans were content to tolerate the existence of a wide variety of local practices. This attitude gave rise to an administrative and fiscal mosaic in which subtle shades of difference existed…the Ottomans were more interested in efficiency than in uniformity…it was precisely this administrative flexibility that enabled the Ottomans to rule for so long over territories as diverse as Serbia and Egypt or Syria and Greece."[13]

As administrators, the Turks were not concerned with culture. In the outlying provinces of their Empire their main preoccupations were financial and military in nature: *"the levying of tribute and the defense of their frontiers."*[14]

The term "Ottoman" was initially used to define both the house of the Ottoman and the ruling group.[15] The Ottomans saw themselves different from the ordinary Turks. Sometime, *"the term Turk took on pejorative connotations and was used to refer disparagingly to illiterate peasants."*[16] Unlike the ruling group, the Muslims in general and the non-Muslims in particular were regarded as *reaya*, (the ruled people, subjects, public, flock). Within the state, it would be possible to see two groups of people: the rulers and the ruled. The rulers were mostly coming form military cadres. Since most posts were open to the whole Muslims, most of the time it would be possible to move into the ruling group. The only exception in this was the Ottoman royal family who were considered as the "owners" of the state.

"A general impression" in the western world *"that Ottoman Government was always incompetent, venal and inept"* has been made powerless since countless Ottoman documents showed

> "That up to the sixteenth century the Empire was governed by an elaborate bureaucratic organization, extremely conscientious in its task of administering a vast Empire. One series of registers alone contains a record, in over 1,000 volumes, of towns, villages, population and revenue for the whole Empire from Budapest to Baghdad. The 50,000 and more bound registers, and the millions of papers, still preserved in the Turkish

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Yayıncılık Matbaacılık, 1985, s. 424.

[13] Cleveland, *ibid.*, p. 45.

[14] Fitzroy Maclean, *Eastern Approaches*, London: Penguin Book, 1991, p. 284.

[15] Fuad Köprülü, *Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kuruluşu,* Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988, s. 5.

[16] Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları.*, İstanbul: Varlık Yayınları, 1977, s. 34; Cleveland, *ibid.*, p. 45.

record office show that whatever may have been the faults of Ottoman administration, it was, in the early and middle periods, anything but ramshackle."[17]

Furthermore, the documents revealed that after the Turkish conquests "most areas" experienced population and prosperity rise.

> "In the Arab lands, Ottoman rule brought peace and security after the heady nightmare of late Memluk rule. In the Balkans, too, Ottoman Government brought unity and security in the place of previous conflict and disorder. In the wars of conquest, a large part of the old landowning aristocracy was destroyed and their ownerless estates were incorporated into the Ottoman feudal system and granted as fiefs to Ottoman soldiers. Under the Ottoman order, the fief-holder was concerned only with revenue and had no seigniorial rights. Thus, the peasants enjoyed far greater freedom on their farms than previously, while the operation of Ottoman law prevented both the fragmentation and the concentration of land-ownership. This security and prosperity, given to peasant agriculture by a Government which had inherited the ancient loyalty owned by the Balkan peoples to the Imperial Byzantine throne, did much to reconcile them to the other imperfections of Ottoman rule, and account in large measure for the long tranquility that reigned in the Balkans until the explosive eruption of nationalist ideas from the West. Even to Constantinople, the Ottoman conquest brought a new prosperity, as the city was transformed from a fossil into the flourishing capital of a great Empire."[18]

In addition, many European politicians, including Lord J. Russell, and foreigners, who visited the Empire, pointed out that out of all the subject peoples, the Turks were the only nation who had power and capability of ruling the vast empire.[19] The Turks did not hesitate to accept a European Christian into their houses as a guest and show their great hospitality to these people. They were gentlemen and were not showing any type of haughtiness towards the non-Muslims.[20]

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[17] Bernard Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East*, Cary, NC, USA: Osford Univeristy Pres, 2004, p. .118.

[18] Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans*, p. 118.

[19] Bilal N. Şimşir, *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians*, volume 1, Ankara: TTK, 1989, s. 38; Warington W. Smyth, *A Year with the Turks or Sketches of Travel in the European and Asiatic Dominions of the Sultan*, New York: Redfield, 1854, 233; Ami Boué, *La Turquie de l'Europe*, Paris, 1840, p. 132.

[20] Smyth, *A Year with the Turks*, p. 181.

The Millet (Nationalities) System

The Ottoman Empire comprised large Christian and Jewish communities known as *Zimme* (Zimma) in the Islamic states. Meaning of "Zimme" was a "*society or community with whom an agreement and promises made.*" According to Islamic laws, the *Zimme* peoples were the Christians and Jews, *Ehl-i Kitap* (the People of the Book), who had rights to live within the state and whose lives and properties were protected by the state. The *Zimme* had to pay *Cizye*, a poll tax, and had to obey some restrictions, such as wearing different color of cloths, riding horse, carrying gun, building new churches or temples. Most of these restrictions were limited to the capital and to some rulers who especially regarded them as "important".[21]

The word "millet" literally means "nation" in English does not entirely covers its literal meaning in the Ottoman context. This word had been used to define religious groups rather than ethnic groups who were subjects of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans defined their subjects according to their religious affiliations[22] in order to create a more effective rule over a multi-religious empire. The *millet* system was a somewhat improved version of Islamic *zimme* system for pragmatic reasons. Its changes resulted from the needs and ways of applying both the Islamic laws and the Turkish ruling abilities. In their endless empire, the Turks granted the *millet* status to three major non-Muslim groups, namely Greek Orthodox, the Jewish and the Gregorian Armenian. They placed the non-Muslims

> "under the direct authority of the leading church officials, namely the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian patriarchs and Jewish grand rabbi, who were selected with the approval of the sultan and resided in Istanbul, where the Ottoman state kept track of their activities."[23]

Although the Ottoman sultans were Muslims and ruled their empire according to the Islamic laws, they were not shy to apply new and special rules in dealing with problems arisen in different parts of their large empire. In the first place, Islam accepted the Christians and the Jews as people of the book, which gave some rights to have an acceptable life in their Islamic state in the times when the democracy and human rights had not been defined and

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[21] Clote Cahen, "Zimme," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 13, Eskişehir: M. E. B., 1997, s. 566; Mansel, *ibid.*, s. 9.

[22] Hugh Poulton, "The Muslim Experience in the Balkan States, 1919-1991," *Nationalities Papers,* Vol. 28, no.1, 2000, p. 46.

[23] Cleveland, *ibid.*, p. 49.

practiced. In the second place, the Turks who had established their own way of ruling methods based on the old Turkish administrative system since the Seljuks[24] and who had accepted impartiality, equality and tolerance among their subjects, as an essential part of administrative duties, willingly granted some ruling rights to the leaders of the non-Muslim religious communities who were considered as minorities. Different groups started to respect the Turkish sultans who was called as "*al-sultan al âdil*" (righteous sultan) and who really valued the rights of their subjects.[25] When Mehmet the Conqueror took Istanbul in 1453, he appointed Gennadios as Orthodox Patriarch and granted rights that the Patriarchate had been granted by the Byzantine Emperors.[26]

Byzantine administrative practices had some effects on the Turks starting in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[27] Because of just taxing and administrative systems of the Ottomans, some non-Muslims were willingly converted into Islam.[28]

The Islamic laws were stronger than the customary laws since they were coming from the Islamic sacred book, the Koran, from the sayings of Prophet Muhammed and from rulings of the Muslim scholars, and since the Ottoman sultans were seen as champions of Islam. However, Islamic laws provided a large space to rulers in dealing with problems.[29] The Customary laws had been coming from experiences that the Turks had received and developed in their long history. These laws were based on four principles: justice, equality,

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[24] İbrahim Kafesoğlu, "Türkler," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 12/2, Eskişehir: M. E. B., 1997, s. 266-267. According to Kafesoğlu, starting with the Seldjuks, the Turks made changes in the Islamic administration. Before them, the Chalifs were considered as the head of both state and religion (Islam). They were successors of Prophet Muhammed and had kind of both religious and worldly powers over the public. The Seldjuks, on the other hand, showed respect to the Abbasid Chalifs, but considered themselves as the real rulers who were believed to have been granted "kut" (sacred rights) to rule over subject peoples and handle worldly affairs. This new approach to administration brought broader religious rights to followers of different religious groups.

[25] Kafesoğlu, "Türkler," s. 267.

[26] Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Vol. 2, s. 153, 158-159; Mansel, *ibid.*, s. 10. According to Uzunçarşılı, the Patriarch was chosen by the Orthodox people and was afterwards appointed by the Sultan. The Ottomans generally obeyed the Orthodox practices that had been applied by the Byzantine Empire.

[27] M. Fuat Köprülü, *Bizans Müesseslerinin Osmanlı Müesseselerine Tesiri*, Ankara: Akçağ, 2004, s. 198.

[28] Topçu, *ibid*, s. 4.

[29] Salâhi R. Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1993, s. 23-24; Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *XIV-XVII. Yüzyıllarda Osmanlılarda Devlet Teşkilatı ve Sosyal Yapı*, Ankara: Türk Tarihi Kurumu, 1996, s. 2, 7.

tolerance and human needs.[30] They treated everyone, regardless of their ethnic or religious standing, as equals. When the both sets of the laws were clashed in any case the Islamic were to be applied in the Empire. Thus, the customary laws would not openly be against the Islamic laws.

Despite early European opinions shaped by mostly wrong views of writers who portrayed the Turks as *"tyrants, barbarians and God's punishment for the sinful Christians,"* the Turks did not exercise harsh rules towards non-Muslim subjects. They did not force them to convert into Islam. Samuel Purchas who collected reports regarding the Ottoman Empire and published them in 1625 said, *"In the Ottoman Empire Christians maintain their heritage. The Turks do not spread religion by the sword."*[31] Francis Osborne's *Political Reflections on the Government of the Turks* (1656) stated that *"The Ottoman state was no more brutal and tyrannical than the monarchies of Europe. With the Ottomans, power depends upon merit rather than birth; hence the Ottomans are free from corruption and idleness, than ruination of Christianity."*[32] When times witnessed harsh religious biases towards other religious groups, the Turks created a type of "secular" rule.

The sources of the customary laws, during the Ottoman period, were mainly *firmans* (decrees) of the Sultans. These decrees were shaped by a long tradition of Turkish ruling practices. Yusuf Has Hacip, a Turkish scholar of the eleventh century, had given a detailed description of rule, ruled and ruler in Turkish culture. In this, true laws, just ruler, tolerance and equality had valued in great deal.[33] In the Turkish rulers' mind, the subjects were generally demanding three things: economic stability, just laws and security. They had to provide these to his subjects. The Turkish rulers in general believed that *"helping the public would make them real masters."*[34]

The Ottoman Sultans who *"were not a true despot, but the supreme custodian of the God-given Holy Law of Islam, to which he himself was subject"*[35] somewhat separated temporal rule from the religious one. This fact was comprehended by Henry Blount who visited the Empire in 1639. According to Blount, Ottoman laws made travels safe and *"The Turks interpret the Koran literally, and made religion suit the*

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[30] Mehmet Saray, *The Principles of Turkish Administration and Their Impact on the Lives of Non-Muslim Peoples: the Armenians as a Case Study*, Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2003, s. 3-6.

[31] Brandon H. Beck, *From the Rising of the Sun: English Images of the Ottoman Empire to 1715*, New York: Peter Lang, 1987, p. 53.

[32] Beck, *ibid.*, p. 68.

[33] R. Rahmeti Arat, "Kutadgu Bilig," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 6, Eskişehir: M. E. B., s. 1038-1047.

[34] Kafesoğlu, "Türkler," s. 230.

[35] Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans*, p. 118.

needs of the state. Their lands do not lie dead in the grasp of the clergy."[36] Although they were accepted as "Sultan-Chaliph" after their capture of Egypt in 1517, they had hardly used the title of Chaliph in their administrative practices until the reign of Abdulhamit II (1876-1909). For the religious matters, they appointed a public servant, Sheyh-ul Islam, who was considered as the head of the *ulema*— Islamic scholars.

The Ottoman Sultans who had inherited their ruling ability and method from their predecessors—the Seljukid Sultans—continued in great deal to practice the Turkish way of governing multi-ethnic and religious communities.

> "While surely not perfect governors or always just to their subjects, the Ottoman sultans had a record of governing that can stand against any of the great empires in history. The tolerance of the Empire was notable: all the religious groups that were present at the beginning of the Ottoman Islamic empire remained in place when it ended, six centuries later."[37]

The Ottoman Sultans saw themselves as the "*protector of the all*" and in order to establish law and order within the Empire they did not hesitate to kill their own sons, brothers and other male relatives who traditionally had rights to rule the state.[38]

At the early years of the Empire, there were three main religious groups, namely the Muslims, the Orthodox Christians, the Gregorian Armenians and the Jews. Later, in the nineteenth century, the Catholics and the Protestants— as a result of missionary activities within the Empire—emerged as new "nations". Among a single big religious community, different types of sects or smaller religious groups were politically recognized as part of the same community. For example, the Romanians, the Serbs, the Bulgarians, the Arabs and other small groups that believed in the Orthodoxy were considered as the Greek Orthodox *millet*.

> "As head of the Orthodox community, the Patriarch administered a separate Orthodox legal system, based on Justinian's code, with the power to fine, imprison and exile. Although weaker and poorer than its Western equivalent the Vatican, the Patriarchate of Constantinople was more important for its flock. It was the symbol and institution which kept faith and hope alive: after the conquest of Constantinople, the rate

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[36] Beck, *ibid*, p. 63–64.

[37] Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire*, London: Arnold, 2001, p. 2.

[38] Topçu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Fatih Dönemi Kamu*, p, 8.

of conversion to Islam in Ottoman domains diminished."[39]

Although the Turks conquered lands like "a lava flood," they left things as it was. *"Turkish oppression was often violent and irresistible, but never constant nor systematic."*[40]

Along with the Greek Orthodox, the Monophysite Armenians got their patriarch in Istanbul in 1461 appointed by the Sultan. The Sultan was seen as *"a supranational hero like Alexander the Great, whom different nationalities could invoke as a protector."*[41]

One of the three important *millets* was the Jews who were advocated to settle in Istanbul. A letter sent by a rabbi from Istanbul to his brother in Europe stated

> "Here in the land of the Turks we have nothing to complain of. We possess great fortunes: much gold and silver are in our hands. We are not oppressed with heavy taxes and our commerce is free and unhindered. Rich are the fruits of the earth. Everything is cheap and every one of us lives in peace and freedom."[42]

The *Millet* system was an administrative system that comprised some privileges to main religious groups within the Empire.

> "The *millet* system had made the Empire a state of exemplary tolerance in which differing religious groups had lived together in relative peace and did not threaten the stability of the government. Under that system, each major religious group had governed most of its important affairs. Welfare, schools and most legal affairs had been left to the individual millets. Christians and Jews were not forced to become either Turks or Muslims. The Empire's peoples remained separated by religion, and remained in that way."[43]

In this system, all minorities freely engaged in their daily activities and their own economic, educational, cultural, social and religious affairs. This was especially vital for the Jews who were in miserable conditions in Europe in

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[39] Mansel, *ibid.*, s. 10.

[40] M. A. Ubicini, *Letters on Turkey: An Account of the Religious, Political, Social, and Commercial Condition of the Ottoman Empire, Part I: Turkey and the Turks, Part II: the Raiahs,* Translated from the French by Lady Easthope, London: John Murray, 1856, p. 12.

[41] Mansel, *ibid.*, s. 12.

[42] Mansel, *ibid.*, s. 15.

[43] McCharty, *The Ottoman Peoples*, p. 9.

those years. Within the Empire,

> "Jews …flourished as perfumers, black-smiths, carpenters and, in exceptional cases, tax farmers, bankers and doctors. With their new found wealth they were able to outbid Christian and Muslim consortiums for the lease of Constantinople's customs. After the first decades, their history is that rarity on Jewish history, a happy story. In Constantinople the words pogrom, ghetto, inquisition had no meaning."[44]

According to Sir Edwin Pears, the Turks were not willing to intervene in the non-Muslim peoples' quarrels and did not want to include them in their judiciary system. Because of these, they granted rights to run their own judicial affairs.[45] Heads of the millets were granted rights to collect tax, involve in education of their people, run justice and religious affairs.[46] The Ottoman tolerance towards minorities gained new dimensions in the nineteenth century. For example, starting in the 1830's, the Bulgarians had their own special school system. This system educated both boys and girls and was a "secular" system that helped the Bulgarians to separate themselves from not only the Greek Church but also from the Empire.[47]

Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment and the French Revolution of 1789 created a totally new view and approach to human life in European religious, administrative, economic, cultural and political environments which were quite conservative, discriminative, exhausting and strict towards both majority and minority peoples. In Europe in the time of the great witch-hunt, roughly from 1450 to 1750, *"European ecclesiastical and secular courts tried and executed tens of thousands of individuals, most of them women, for the crime of witchcraft."*[48] In addition, the Jews had faced great discriminations, pressures and massacres throughout Europe starting with Peter the Hermit's bands of thousands who before moving east to fight against the Turks during the First Crusade. A fierce anti-Semitism continued to terrorize the Jews. The British

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[44] Mansel, *ibid.*, s. 16.

[45] Sir Edwin Pears, *Life of Abdul Hamid*, London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1917, p. 26.

[46] Cleveland, *ibid.*, 49.

[47] Pierre Voillery, "Le Développement des Écoles Parmi les Populations de L'Empire Otoman au XIXe Siècle: L'esample d'Alexandre Exarth (1847–1853)," *Turcica*, 32, 2000, p. 59–83.

[48] Brian P. Levack, "The Great Withc-Hunt," *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600*, volume 2, Edited by T. A. Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, J. D. Tracy, New York: E. J. Brill, 1995, p. 607, 616–617. According to the author, around 70 percent of people who had been tried were women. More than 100.000 trials were held and more than 50 percent of the tried people were executed.

expelled them from England in 1290, a big anti-Jewish revolt took place in Spain in 1391, all the Jews were exiled from Spain in 1492 and all the Jews in Portugal were forcefully converted to the Christianity in 1497.[49] Furthermore, deadly battles and always existed between the Muslims and the Christians and between different Christian sects. According to Toynbee,

> "The Christians have not been given orders to do anything but preach and instruct; yet, in spite of this, from time immemorial they have been exterminating by fire and sword all those who are not of their religion….We may feel certain that, if the Western Christians, instead of the Saracens and the Turks, had won the dominion over Asia, there would be today not a trace left of the Greek Church, and that they would never have tolerated Mahometanisim as the Infidels have tolerated Christianity there."[50]

All throughout the High Middle Ages down to the Modern Times, it was quite difficult for the "others" to live in European countries. However, the Ottoman Empire, despite its some shortcoming, presented a place where almost all sorts of people had a safe enough environment to enjoy life. Although the Muslims were the dominant people within the Empire, the "others" had their own "*inferior, minority status*"[51] which was much more acceptable to the whole minorities prior to the modern times. According to Lewis, "*If we define toleration as the absence, not of discrimination, but of persecution, then the Ottoman record until the late nineteenth century is excellent.*"[52] Still,

> "For most Europeans, the loss of Constantinople is a great historical disaster, a defeat of Christendom which has never been repaired. In spite of the present friendly relations between Turkey and the West, there is still a reserve of mistrust, and even at times of hostility, with roots deep in the European Christian past. For most literate West Europeans, the words "Turk" and "Turkey" have complex emotional associations, coloured by centuries of strife; and for East Europeans the traditional picture of the Turkish oppressor has become part of the national folk-

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[49] Robert Bonfil, "Aliens within: The Jes and Antijudaism," *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600*, volume 1, Edited by T. A. Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, J. D. Tracy, New York: E. J. Brill, 1995, p. 266–267.

[50] Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, London: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 209.

[51] Wahakn N. Dadrian, "The Armenian Question and the Wartime Fate of the Armenians as Documented by the Officials of the Otoman Empire's World War I Allies: Germany and Austria-Hungary," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (2002), p. 61.

[52] Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans*, p. 119.

lore."[53]

In the Ottoman Empire, the minorities had to pay some taxes, such as *cizye*, in return for their absence in military and civil servant position. However, the Ottoman Turks employed some non-Muslims in both civil and military jobs. Some "*ten and twenty percent of all sipahis*" (cavalry) from the Balkans were from the non-Muslims. These soldiers were given lands, *tımar*.[54] Most of Ottoman translators were chosen among the non-Muslims. Administrators of Moldova and Walachia were also chosen among the Phanariot Greeks. As taxes of the non-Muslims were concerned, the minorities paid around the same amount as the Muslims did.[55] According to Yapp,

> "It is…suggested that all non-Muslims paid a special tax, the *jizye*, but in fact there was considerable discrimination between non-Muslim groups, depending upon age, status and services to the state and it has been calculated that no more than one-third of non-Muslims actually paid the tax."[56]

In 1489, the total amount of *cizye* collected in the Empire was around 31 million *akçe* which made of eight percent of the whole income.[57] However, not serving in the military and in the governmental circles helped the minorities to focus on economic and commercial activities. Furthermore, in order to escape from paying *cizye*, considerable number of minorities illegally benefited from capitulations. One way was to carry passports of foreign states.[58]

The minorities economically became better than the rest.

> "Each community could set up its own welfare institutions which depended on its own financial resources. To support their institutions, the communities were permitted to collect their own internal taxes. State taxes were collectively assessed by the local Ottoman authorities to the local community as a whole, based on the number and wealth of its members. But the actual collection of taxes was done by community-appointed tax collectors. The amount of taxes that the community was assessed was generally set through negotiations between the community leadership and the local authorities. If the community felt aggrieved it

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[53] Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans*, p. 115.

[54] Kafadar, "The Ottomans and Europe," p. 601.

[55] H. von Moltke, *Türkiye Mektupları*, Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1969, s. 244.

[56] M. E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East, 1792–1923*, New York: Longman, 1987, p. 6.

[57] Halil İnalcık, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600," *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914,* Edited by Halil Inalcık and Donald Quataert, Cambridge: University Peress, 1994, p. 66.

[58] Ahmet Refik, *Türk İdaresinde Bulgaristan*, İstanbul: Enderun Kitapevi, 1989, s. 78-79.

could, and often did, appeal to the state courts or the central authorities."[59]

Furthermore, they paid taxes according to their wealth that was determined by both the local or state officials and minority representatives.

Advantages of the Millet System

The *millet* system has produced many useful and good results for both the rulers and the ruled. The rulers, the Ottoman Turks, had created an efficient way of ruling the multi-religious groups by granting large rights to the religious leaders of the each community in return for obedience of their *millets* to Ottoman law and order. The rights of *millets* were limited by both Islamic and Customary laws. As long as millets did not openly disobey these laws, they kept their own way of life.

The subject peoples had received many values from the *millet* system. They had a kind of communal support for solving their economic, social and cultural problems. They were capable of establishing strong ties with their religious fellow-persons, which helped them to keep their own mixtures and escape being assimilated by larger groups.

> "Leaders of the various millets enjoyed wide jurisdiction over their members, who were bound by their own regulations rather than the Sharia (Islamic Law). The Ottoman state treated the millets like corporate bodies. It encouraged the perpetuation of their own internal structures and hierarchies by dealing exclusively with their leaders as opposed to the individual members. These structures included educational systems specific to each religious community. The millet became established as the prime focus of identity outside of family and locality, bequeathing a legacy of confusion in modern times between concepts of citizenship, religion and ethnicity."[60]

One of privileges of *millets* was social cooperation. Each member of the millet shared a common life without being assimilated by a larger community or culture. Within the millet, they shared both daily joys and miseries, which made them stronger against difficulties they faced.[61] They lived as a separate community within communities and as a state within the state. They kept their own characteristic cultural, social and religious structures, which later helped them to establish independent states in a very short time

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[59] *http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/publications/faculty_research/sec_4.pdf*

[60] Poulton, *ibid.*, p. 47.

[61] İlber Ortaylı, " Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Millet Sistemi," *Türkler*, Vol. 10, s. 217.

when they parted from the Empire.[62]

Ottoman minorities were lawfully organized communities. Their religious freedom and rights were envied by minorities of neighboring states.[63]   They even were luckier than the Turks in some instances. Since the Turks knew the state as the only organization to be obeyed, they from time to time suffered at the hands of incompetent officials. During difficult times, such as wars, famine, internal conflicts, banditry, the state could not provide desired safety and protection to them. In these times, the minorities had better chances to help each other in their *millet* system than the Turks.[64]

Disadvantages of the Millet System

Millet system had many disadvantages. It created a suitable place for minorities to turn their attention easily from a religious community to a separatist nationalist group. Since the *millet* system was based on religious identities, it helped minorities to keep their own national tenets. When nationalism began to affect peoples in the nineteenth century, as a result of the French Revolution of 1789, the multi-ethnic empires faced a great danger. The *millets* found a strong position to develop nationalist attitudes within the Empire. Thus, the *millet* system was a short step to nationalist separatism. "*Religion, the traditional self-identifier of Ottoman subjects, was turned to the purposes of nationalism in the new states*"[65] founded after rebellions and foreign interventions in the Ottoman Empire.

The *millet* system made no distinction among different ethnic communities. As long as different ethnic groups believed in the same faction of their religion, they were considered the same and were subjected to same sorts of treatments. These approaches to different groups regardless of ethnic and geographic distinctions curtailed creation of more real policies to deal with the problems. Furthermore, within the *millet* system, the Greeks had great opportunities since they were employed among the whole Orthodox subjects to run churches and millet affairs. Because of the power given to the Greeks, the Greeks tried to assimilate the Bulgarians, Romanians and others. This created a kind of hatred among non-Greek Orthodox groups towards the Greeks. They tried to have their own churches and be ruled by their own religious men.[66]

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[62] Peter Mentzel, "Millets, States and National Identities," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 28, no. 1, 2000, p. 201-202.

[63] Şimşir, *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians*, Vol. 1, p. 114.

[64] *Koçi Bey*, hazırlayan Z. Danışman, İstanbul: MEB, 1972, s. 50.

[65] McCharty, *The Ottoman Peoples*, p. 50.

[66] Smyth, *ibid.*, p. 232.

The *millet* system somewhat prevented Ottoman subjects to have a similar culture. Thus, the Ottoman subjects failed to be a single nation.[67] Every community remained separate, which eased ways for separatist movements emerged in the nineteenth century. Despite serious reforms and Ottomanist ideology, the Ottomans failed to keep the whole society intact.

Unrests among the Minorities

The nineteenth century was a chaotic century for the Ottoman Empire. It was also a century of weakness and territorial disintegration. Causes of these vices came from many sources, including hungry appetite of imperialist big powers, nationalist and separatist minorities and weaknesses and corruptions of the Ottoman institutions.

Economic, military, political and cultural rise of the western world in the modern times was one of the most important reasons for the uprisings held by the Ottoman minorities in the nineteenth century, during which the "clear looser" in international relations was the Ottoman Empire. She faced and dealt with dangers from within and outside. European great powers had designs on Ottoman territories and politics.[68] In this, religion, past history and geographic consciousness played important roles. As far as religion was concerned, most of the Ottoman minorities had religious ties with the western nations. The Orthodox group leaned towards Russia while the Catholics were receiving help from France. The British, Germans and other European nations supported the idea of helping their co-religionists to separate them from the Empire.

> "In its dealings with the outside world and with its own internal problems, the Ottoman government was harmed by the dark picture which most of the people of Europe held of it, an attitude which was in a sense a carry-over of the old crusading spirit of the past."[69]

Even though the Ottomans established protective and tolerant policies towards the non-Muslims and even though the Christians and the Muslims lived an acceptable life side by side, the destructive interferences of the big powers started to enter the Empire in the nineteenth century. Because of foreign interventions, not only the minorities started to show unrest against the Empire but also the Muslims developed a hostile attitude against the minorities.[70] According to a contemporary observer, troubles in the Balkans

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[67] Kemal H. Karpat, *Türk Demokrasi Tarihi: Sosyal, Ekonomik, Kültürel Temeller*, İstanbul: AFA Yayıncılık, 1996, s. 30.

[68] Barbara Jelavich, *The Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers, and the Straits Question 1870-1887,* London: Indiana University Press, 1973, p. vii-viii.

[69] Jelavich, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 10.

[70] Mahmut Celalettin Paşa, *Mir'ât-ı Hakîkat: Târihî Hakîkatların Aynası*, Hazırlayan İsmet

started by Slavonic conspiracy groups and unfortunately some people in England viewed the situation as a Turkish despotism and encouraged the Russians to attack Turkey.[71]

Because of Ottoman weaknesses, during the nineteenth century, sometime a ruler of big power or even an ambassador would be more powerful than the Ottoman *sadrazam* or a high ranking administrator in dealing with internal and external affairs. Among the big powers, Russia presented the greatest danger towards the Ottoman unity and peace. Russian rulers, especially Peter I (1682-1725) who had a policy of "*capturing Istanbul and destroying the Ottoman Empire and who left this policy to his successors,*" used Christian minorities of the Empire as a tool for their expansionist goals.[72] After signing a harsh treaty, Kuchuk Kaynarja, with the Ottomans in 1774, Russia claimed to have rights to protect the Orthodox *millet*.[73] She used such claims "*as a pretext for frequent interventions in Ottoman internal affairs.*"[74] When Napoleon Bonaparte and Alexander I met in Tilsit in 1807 to determine the fate of the world in general and Europe in particular, France acted like inheritor of the Western Roman Empire and Russia proceeded like the successor of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium).[75]

As extremely expansionist power, Russia provided every type of help to the Balkan nations, including military training, weapons, outside agitators, propagators and emotions.[76] Russia became quite powerful state in Europe after she defeated Napoleon Bonaparte who marched his grand army to invade her in 1812. "*The emergence of Russia to continental hegemony in place of defeated France was …the replacement of one evil with another.*"[77]

After satisfying in its western borders in the Vienna settlements of 1815, Russia turned her attentions towards the East, the Balkans and the Near East.

Miroğlu, İstanbul: Berekât Yayınevi, 1983, s. 31.

[71] Henry Hope Crealock, *The Eastern Question, and the Foreign Policy of Great Britain: A Series of Papers from 1870 to 1878,* London: Chapman and Hall, 1878, p. 112.

[72] Mahmut Celalettin Paşa, *Mir'ât-ı Hakîkat*, s. 26–27.

[73] J. C. Hurewitz, "The Background of Russia's Claims to the Turkish Straits," *Belleten*, 28/111 (Temmuz 1964), p. 459–502.

[74] Cleveland, *ibid.*, p. 51; Mahmut Celalettin Paşa, *Mir'ât-ı Hakîkat*, s. 27.

[75] Hans Kohn, *Basic History of Modern Rusia: Political, Cultural, and Social Trends*, New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1957, p. 13.

[76] Mustafa Nuri Paşa, *Netayic ül-Vukuat: Kurumları ve Örgütleriyle Osmanlı Tarihi*, Sadeleştiren Neşet Çağatay, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1992, s. 244-245.

[77] Barbara Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814-1914*, New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1964, p. 37.

She did not care her promises because treaties with Russia were nothing more than *"to quietly undermine the next proposed field of operation –until the convenient moment has arrived."* Russia always considered possibilities of annexing new lands. She used every means, including diplomacy and war, to pursue her expansionism. *"No nation in the world is as consummately skilful in the art of diplomacy as the Muscovite."*[78] Even though the Vienna settlement required big powers to protect *"conservative Europe,"* not to encourage nationalist uprisings and not to help separatist movements within empires, the Serbian revolt started in 1804 and the Greek revolt started in 1821 gained wide supports of both western public and political circles. Russia helped the Serbs sending weapons, military trainers and diplomatic pressure over the Ottomans. She even made an agreement with the Serbs to join Serbia with Russia in 1807.[79] The port city of Odessa in the northern coast of the Black Sea became the center of conspiracy against the Ottoman Empire. Russia supported Greek designs. *"The Greeks regarded Russia as their protector against Ottoman tyranny."* In 1814, the Society of Friends (Philike Hetairia) was founded in this city to recruit conspirators for revolt, to collect money from wealthy Greeks, and to lead the revolt. Alexander Ypsilanti, a major general in the Russian army and aide-de-camp of the tsar, led the movement.[80] In addition, Russian, English and French fleets destroyed the Ottoman fleet in Navarine in 1827, which helped the Greeks to pursue a successful revolt. In the end, it was Russian armies that defeated the Ottomans in the war of 1828-29, which granted independence to the Greeks.

Accusations that the Ottomans were oppressing Christian villagers in the Balkans were not entirely groundless accusation. There were examples of Ottoman injustices committed by some state servants or the *janissaries.* For example, before the Serbian revolt broke out in 1804, the Ottoman *janissaries* who were employed in Serbia had committed atrocities against the locals by exerting heavy taxes. However, the Ottoman central administration condemned such actions and initially supported Serbian reaction against these janissaries.[81] Yet, after suppressing unlawful actions of the janissaries, the Serbian revolutionaries turned against the state, starting the first major minority revolt in the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman authoritarian rule was greatly exaggerated by many Europeans who openly criticized it as "Ottoman yoke" over "Christian peoples of the Balkans." The main goal of these types of accusations was to cheat the European public mind in order to make an unfavorable notion towards the

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[78] Crealock, *ibid.*, p. 22.

[79] Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 62–63.

[80] Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy,* p. 64–65.

[81] Nuri Paşa, *Netayic ül-Vukuat*, s. 209, 243-245. The Janissaries who did not obey rules and laws were even killed Otoman governor of Belgrade, Mustafa Pasha.

Turks. Among these groups, politicians who supported imperialist policies of Russia, Austria-Hungary and other big powers, minorities who had sought helps from Europe to separate from the Empire and prejudiced Christians, such as E. Gladstone of England who openly criticized the Ottomans in his book published in 1876.[82] Even the enlightenment somewhat badly affected the Ottomans. Because the enlightenment occurred in the eighteenth century, Europeans who thought themselves as enlightened came to undermine rest of the world. They were egotist and considered rest of the world as stagnant and unfit to civilization.[83]

Some Europeans who had been to the Ottoman Empire and who had had opportunities to live among the Turks wrote differently. One of them, Smyth, wrote,

> "It has long been the systematic course of the enemies of Turkey not only to sow dissension, but to persuade the rest of Europe, that a cruel oppression is exercised towards the cultivators of the soil. But whilst such sweeping assertions are distinctly false, it will be found that where cases of injustice and wrong have occurred, they are generally traceable to the irregular and vexatious imposts levied by certain governors. These occasions are becoming yearly more infrequent; some of the excesses have been stayed by enactments of the government, others by the biter feeling which has arisen with the amelioration of the state of all classes."[84]

Adaptation of Modern Ideas in Administration

Gülhane Hatt-i Humayunu (The Tanzimat Decree)

Before realizing superiority of the west in military, economic, scientific and political areas, the Ottomans had been firm in their supremacy in moral and worldly affairs. However, roughly starting with the great defeat before Vienna in 1683, the Ottomans began to experience big military shortcomings at the hands of either the Russians or Austrians. They started to ask themselves questions, such as what went wrong? They gradually accepted the fact that they were getting weaker before the European nations. They started to make changes in military, economics and other institutions. But these changes were too slow to catch the west and to meager to modernize the state. Furthermore, there were great obstacles before changes, for instance the military (*the janissaries*) and religious scholars and intellectuals (*ulema).* Modernization and

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[82] W. E. Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, London: John Murray, 1876, p. 31.

[83] Ortaylı, "Avrupalı Seyahatnamelerinde Türkiye ve Türkler," s. 421–426.

[84] Smyth, *ibid.*, p. 233.

westernization were not only making changes in institutions but also increasing power and capabilities of the Empires. Russia quite early realized this fact and during the reign of Peter I (1682-1725) brought fundamental changes that made her powerful to create a large empire at the expense of the Ottomans.[85]

Despite great obstacles, the Ottomans tried to reform institutions, starting with the military. The *Lale* (Tulip) era (1718-1730), the reigns of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807) and Sultan Mahmut II (1808-1839) were some of the most productive times as far as reforms were concerned. Yet, the *Tanzimat* decree carried reforms into a larger scale.

The *Tanzimat Ferman* decreed by Sultan Abdulmecit (1839-1861) in 1839 was a great step in new rights granted to both the Muslims and the minorities within the Empire. It was a result of works performed by Mustafa Reshid Pasha who had been an Ottoman ambassador to Paris and London. He was influenced by western politicians, ideas and administrative methods, political and social life. He was convinced that the future of the Empire lied in modernization and acceptance of modern western laws. Mustafa Reshid Pasha (1800-1858) who committed himself "*to remake the governing institutions of the Ottoman Empire in the image of Europe*" was the leading statesman of the *Tanzimat* Era (1839-1876). He succeeded in raising two other statesmen, namely Âli and Fuat Pashas, who had worked hard to modernize the state in the sense of western civilization.[86]

The *Ferman* that aimed both "*the state's continuation and minority fatefulness to the state*" openly stated that regardless of their creed, all the subject peoples' lives, properties and moral values were to be protected by the state. All the subjects were accepted as equals before the laws.[87] It was important because it was promising to ameliorate lives of the whole subjects.[88] Effects of the *Tanzimat* decree of 1839 were soon observable in many parts of the Empire. In this respect, Monastir which was located in Macedonia and housed some 45.000 people, of this number "about 22.000 were Muslims, 3.000 Jews, 1.500 Catholics, 2.500 Gypsies and 17,000 members of the Greek Church," became an "oasis of civilization" in the early *Tanzimat* era. A European artist, Edward Lear, visited the city and wrote,

> "The glitter and beauty of outward appearance would be exchanged on
> entering the city for squalor and dreariness, I was agreeably surprised at

[85] Arnold Toynbee, *The World and the West*, London: Oxford University Pres, 1953, p.20.
[86] Cleveland, *ibid.*, p. 80.
[87] Bernard Lewis, *Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu*, Ankara: T. T. K., 1991, p. 107; Mahmut Celalettin Paşa, *Mir'ât-ı Hakîkat*, s. 32.
[88] Engelhardt, *Tanzimat ve Türkiye*, translated by Ali Reşad, İstanbul: Kaknüs, 1999, s.44.

the great extent of public buildings, barracks, and offices at the entrance…within it, at the width and good pavement of the streets, the cleanliness and neatness of the houses."[89]

Regardless of their creed, the whole people in Monastir enjoyed new rights and westernization. *"On Sundays at the Café Abdi Pasha, Monastir's elite women socialized in their crinoline dresses, and on a daily basis the European-style café hosted Turks, Jews, Christians and the full Monastir's citizens."* Women and men of each community presented their own styles in their outfits.[90] Besides Monastir, in many parts of the Balkans, the Greeks and the Bulgarians openly stated that they had no problems with the Turks. In Leskovatz, which was located on Morava River and housed some 12.000 population, mostly the Greeks and Bulgarians, people said, *"We don't complain of the Turks—there are few amongst them who make bad masters; but we cannot be happy till these lawless bands (of bandits) are kept in check, and life and property more secure."*[91] They were quite independent and satisfied with their way of life that the Ottoman rule provided for them.

The Ottomans declared the *Gülhane Hatt-ı Humayun* (*Tanzimat Fermani*) to create a more modern state, to gain supports of England and France against insurgent Mehmet Ali Pasha, Egyptian governor, and Russia, to increase fatefulness of the subject peoples towards the state and to create a sense of "Ottomanism" among the whole people. However, by the *Ferman*, the non-Muslims started to enjoy being recognized as equals and started to demand more freedom. They began to seek the help of Europeans whom they considered as their Christian brothers. The non-Muslims started to increasingly incline towards separation from the Empire.[92]

The western public opinion that created media and that had important sayings in state affairs was unknown in the Ottoman Empire.[93] In order to gain public support, Sultan Mahmut II started to publish a newspaper, *Takvim-i Vekayi*. The Sultan's approach to the minorities was quite humane and broadminded. He viewed his subjects as equals. His famous words, *"I want to see the Muslims in the Mosques, the Christians in the Churches and the Jews in the Temples,"*[94] have reflected his open-mindedness to the whole subjects of the

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[89] Marc Cohen, "Monastir: Oasis of Civilization, 1839-63," *The Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, Volume 24, no. 2 (Fall 2000), p. 3.

[90] Cohen, "Monastir: Oasis of Civilization, 1839–63," p. 9–11.

[91] Smyth, *ibid.*, p. 216.

[92] Engelhardt, *ibid.*, p. 60.

[93] Enver Ziya Karal, "Mahmut II," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 7, Eskişehir:M.E.B., 1997,s. 168.

[94] Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Vol. V, Ankara: TTK, 1988, s. 152.

Empire.

The Turkish rule towards the subject peoples was generally objective. During an Albanian revolt took place in 1850's in Vrania (Kosova), the Albanians knocked down a church. All the Turks were unhappy of this event. But they did not have enough power to prevent it. They had to hide in their houses until the rebellion ended.[95]

The Islahat (Reform) Decree

The Islahat Fermanı (the Reform Decree) which was mentioned by the Paris Peace Treaty of 1856 further developed minority rights given by *Tanzimat* decree of 1839. Its aim was to satisfy both foreign and minority demands for new political, administrative and economical rights to the minorities. It was hoped by both the Ottomans and the foreigners that the Empire was going to be more peaceful as far as minority demands and foreign interferences were concerned. However, it did not have a fundamental effect on the traditional relations between Russia and the Ottoman Empire because of Russia's claims and aggressive policies towards the Turkish rule.[96]

The declaration was shaped under western diplomatic pressure, especially from Britain and France who aligned with the Ottomans against the Russians in the Crimean War of 1853-1856. It reiterated rights that were granted by the *Tanzimat* decree. It also contained new fundamental reforms, including creation of mixed courts for both the Muslims and non-Muslims, treatments of the non-Muslims as fully equals, protection for all faith distinctions, establishments of mix assemblies in administrative and judicial ranks, acceptance of the non-Muslims into the high court, *Meclis-i Ahkam-ı Adliye.*[97]

With reform decrees, the non-Muslims pretty much received equal rights. They were increasingly involved in the public, judicial and governmental affairs. In the centers of provinces, sub-provinces and other important administrative units, the non-Muslims were equally represented in administrative and judicial assemblies that helped governors and judges.[98] However, in return for newly gained rights, the non-Muslims had to serve in the military and in official posts, which was not a flattering development for them. In addition, it brought a kind of democratic rights for *millet* members to establish their own assemblies to

[95] Smyth, *ibid*, p. 205.
[96] Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 117.
[97] Lewis, *Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu*, s. 116-117; Engelhardt, *ibid.*, p. 137-138.
[98] Şimşir, *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians*, Volume 1, p. 116–118.

choose their leaders and to run their communal affairs, which was an unfavorable reform for religious leaders who had long had monopoly over their community. Despite hopeful expectations, new rights did not produce desired effects in keeping peace and unity within the Empire. The *Ferman* became "*a tool for the Christian minorities to make endless demands and a scarecrow for the Muslims.*"[99]

Although the big powers promised not to interfere into Ottoman internal affairs, but to protect Ottoman territorial unity in the Paris Peace Conference of 1856, the problems in the aftermath of this peace gained new momentum. During the Crimean War, most of the Bulgarians and the Armenians seemed as supportive of the Empire and the Turkish rule.[100] However, minorities unhealthily increased their separatist demands, which opened new excuses for the big powers to increase their interferences into the Empire's affairs. In return for these developments the Muslim scorns increased. While the minorities increased their uprisings, the big powers, especially Russia, deepened destructive policies. They created a new political ideology called Pan-Slavism that quite badly affected the Empire. Others supported missionary activities, opening of foreign schools and exporting their cultural values to the Ottoman subjects. All these contributed to widen spaces between different ethnic and religious groups. A British document stated that if outside interferences would not exist, the Turks could have been capable of ruling minorities without any problem.[101]

In order to run a more democratic rule, the Ottomans established mix courts that settled cases of both the Muslims and the non-Muslims according to laws imported form Europe. In this respect, largely French codes were accepted besides the Ottoman laws, *Mejelleh*.

The Jews, Greeks, and the Armenians succeeded in establishing advanced schooling systems throughout the Empire. After the Robert College that was particularly educating Christian boys and girls, the Greeks established their own schools, including one on the Halki Island. "*It was rare to meet with a Greek, man or woman, who did not know how to read and write in his own language. It was almost unknown to find a Turk outside officialdom who could do so.*"[102]

The Ottomans were firm in their words and always valued their agreements with the western big powers. They tried to make use of the European balance of power policies and rivalries existed among the big powers.

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[99] Engelhardt, *ibid.*, p. 155.

[100] Smyth, *ibid*, p. 240-241.

[101] Şimşir, *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians*, Vol. 1, p. 704.

[102] Pears, *ibid.*, p. 28-30.

However, the big powers generally did not show the same cordiality in their relations with the Porte. While the Port showed great respect to the sanctity of treaties, big powers had little respect to the treaties they signed with the Porte. *"It would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that their attitude resembled that of the United States government toward the Indian tribes."*[103]   They always created new problems for the Ottomans.   For example, Pan-Slavic ideology born in the 1860's provided Russian tsars and other officials to make good use of religious and nationalist feelings of the Slavs living outside of Russia, which greatly caused the Ottoman, as well as the Austria-Hungarian, Empire to disintegrate.   The Ottomans, on the other hand, failed to create a common ideology among either Muslims or Turkic people of Russia and Central Asia, in the aftermath of the Crimean War.   Occupying a poorer position, in a material and an ideological sense, the Ottoman statesmen's power was limited.

The Proclamation of Constitution (1876)

With the decrees of 1839 and 1856, the Ottoman Empire gradually made important changes in its firm Islamic values in administrative, social and political structures.   This development let to a kind of secularist state structure in which all subjects were accepted as equals before the laws.   Besides official changes, 1860's and 1870's saw quite large developments in literature, newspaper and ideas.   Many Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen, such as Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha, Şinasi, Mithat Pasha, who were known as the young Ottomans, presented new world views based on territorial unity of the Empire and Ottomanism, in which their ultimate goal was to achieve a single Ottoman nation regardless of differences in ethnicity and religion.   The idea of Ottomanism has left some long-lasting effects in Bosnia and other parts of the Balkans.   Many travelers who visited Bosnia in the first quarter of the twentieth century claimed that the Ottoman rule in Bosnia was still visible.   Bosnia looked to them as a place where the east and the west met.[104]

Ottomanism aimed to create a single state and a single Ottoman nation by stressing the importance of fatherland.   It was also an outcome of political developments taken place in Europe since the Enlightenment.   In order to save the state from internal and external enemies, the young Ottomans sought a modern state.   Furthermore, since most of internal and external problems faced by the Empire had come from both minority uprisings and outside interventions, the young Ottomans aimed to prevent Russia and other big powers to interfere into the Ottoman affairs and to gain loyalties of all the Ottoman subjects.   In order to reach this goal, the first Ottoman constitution

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[103] Jelavich, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 12.

[104] Omer Hadziselimovic, "Snowy Domes and Gay Turbans: American Travelers on Bosnia, 1897–1941," *East European Quarterly*, xxxvi, no. 1 (March 2002), p. 28–30.

proclaimed in 1876 brought some equality to all the subjects.[105]

Although this constitution did not end the fundamental power of the Sultan, it provided electoral rights to all the subjects to choose their representatives to the new chamber of deputies. According to constitution, two chambers—higher and deputy—were to function. The higher chamber members were appointed by the Sultan among well-known statesmen. In 1877, this assembly consisted of 40 members, of which 5 were non-Muslims. Furthermore, the chamber of deputies was made of 56 Muslim and 40 non-Muslim members.[106] The constitution was *"a proclamation of Ottomanism and Ottoman patriotism; it was an assertion that the empire was capable of resolving its problems and that it had the right to remain intact as it then existed."*[107]

When and Why Ottoman Rule Failed to Attract the Minorities?

Starting with *Tanzimat* decree of 1839 and continuing with *Islahat* decree of 1856 and proclamation of *Kanun-u Esasi* in 1876, the Ottoman minorities received great deal of rights that made them quite comfortable within the empire despite some small problems. Throughout the Empire, in the 1870's, *"Happily the great body of the inhabitants of Turkey, Christians and Moslems, were an orderly people, a fact which was probably due to some extent to the presence everywhere of men who had served in the army,"* said Pears. However, some problems continued to create barriers before a total equality of all subjects; the Muslim feelings of superiority and the non-Muslim greediness for inexhaustible new demands.

> "The Moslem always has a tendency to be insolent towards his Christian neighbors. He can never divest himself of the notion that he has a divine right to be dominant. The Christians accepted the fact that it was necessary for them to be subservient and, except when religious fanaticism was called into play by exceptional circumstances; there were few disturbances between them. Fanaticism was latent and was never altogether absent."[108]

Ottoman reforms throughout the nineteenth century helped the non-Muslims to have an "unparalleled advance." They were increasingly involved in government jobs, economics, journalism and education. *"The millets were transformed into secular institutions and in some cases became the nucleus of separate states."*[109]

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[105] Karpat, *Türk Demokrasi Tarihi*, s. 35.

[106] Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Vol. 8, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988, s. 232, 237.

[107] Cleveland, *ibid.*, p. 83.

[108] Pears, *ibid.*, p. 31-32.

[109] Yapp, *The Making of Modern Near East*, p. 10.

Despite large scale efforts by intellectuals, statesmen and others to create an "Ottoman nation" out of all the subjects of the State during the *Tanzimat* era, problems between different subject groups and state never ceased.

> "With the decline of the Ottoman Empire, some of the traditional charges against the Turks become in part justified. Ottoman culture declined into mere repetition and imitation of earlier models. Ottoman administration ran down until the Empire really was ramshackle. Increasing weakness in the face of foreign invasion and internal rebellion often led to oppression and brutality and tyranny. Suspicion, hatred, fear— and sometimes, we may add, the example of Western intolerance— transformed the Turkish attitude to the subject peoples."[110]

While the non-Muslims were after full independence with the help of foreigners regardless of historical and numerical facts, the Muslims had an "*innate attitude of superiority*" and were willing to recognize only a "*contemptuous half-toleration*" towards the non-Muslims. According to C. Max Kortepeter, "*the ultimate dissolution of the empire was due to 'the inability of the Ottoman authorities 'to respond to the grievances of the various units of the Empire'.*"[111] However, it would seem impossible to accept a genuine Ottoman authority taken hold of the whole Empire in the last decades. In this period, foreign involvements and interferences were great and, thus, responsibilities of bad administration would have to be distributed among all the forces that had had some effects in the Ottoman rule. Foreign pressure was so great that the Ottoman *Sadrazam* or governors could not act freely. They were forced to accept foreign demands. Before the Bulgarians revolted in 1876, Russian ambassador in Istanbul openly asked the Sadrazam Mahmut Nedim Pasha to dismiss honest provincial administrators because these were working hard to keep the Empire's authority run in Bulgaria. Mahmut Nedim Pasha eventually accepted the Russian ambassador's demands, dismissed some provincial rulers and released Bulgarian prisoners who had been found guilty scheming against the Empire.[112] Similarly, British consul Henderson reported in 1878 that the governors of Aleppo and Zeytun were harsh towards the Armenians. Because of his complains, the Ottoman government dismissed these governors and released some Armenians from prisons who were convicted of plotting against the state.[113]

Although the Ottomans, with the western pressures, tried every means to create a united state by granting modern and equal rights to their subjects

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[110] Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans*, p. 119.

[111] Dadrian, *ibid.*, p. 61.

[112] Mahmut Celalettin Paşa, *Mir'ât-ı Hakîkat*, s. 64.

[113] Şimşir, *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians*, vol. 1, p. 278, 291, 355.

regardless of their creed, both the hungry minorities who were not satisfied by anything but total independence and opportunist and imperialist big powers who never stopped to make new plans to protect their future military, economic, political and cultural interests in the Empire continued to create dangerous situations within the Empire. As the Ottoman power was gradually fading, both the minorities and the outsiders helped each other in the hope of receiving the lion's share. Starting with revolts broken out in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1875, and continuing with the war with Serbia, Bulgarian revolt of 1876 and the war with Russia in 1877-78, the Ottoman Empire came to the brink of its total collapse in 1878. The Balkan states, namely Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Monte-Negro, were strengthened and founded after wars with Russia and interventions of the big powers.[114] It followed a strict rule of Abdul Hamit II, which limited freedom to all subjects, especially the intellectuals, leaned towards Germany and favored a kind of "Pan-Islamic" policies. When new imperialist tendencies gained great momentum in the first years of the twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire became a place for new games. She was not a predator but she was a victim at the hands of imperialist states.

The non-Muslims who were still living under the Ottoman rule in the Balkans, Anatolia and in the Middle East increasingly came under the pressure and authority of the so-called revolutionary parties that were mostly established outside the Empire. Two of such organizations were established by the Armenians who were mostly originated from the Russian Armenia. The Hınchaks, founded in Geneva in 1887 and the Dashnaks, founded in Tiblisi in 1890, followed dangerous methods. Instead of searching reforms and improved administrative rights for the Armenians, they created "*a Turko-Armenian conflict.*" They caused "*sporadic acts of terrorism and retaliatory punitive raids and individual deadly assaults*"[115] that deepened the problem.

Because of heavy foreign interventions and ceaseless demands of minorities, the Ottomans Sultan Abdulhamit II applied a strict rule during his long-lasted reign from 1876 to 1909. Abdulhamit leaned towards the idea of Pan-Islamism while he was still keeping old Ottoman practices in administration. Yet, the minorities and foreign states continued asking new alterations. Large parts of the Balkans were lost in 1878 to Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Monte-Negro, after one of the worst defeats at the hands of the Russians. The Armenians started to deepen their demands and openly challenge the *Babıali* (the Porte—Ottoman Government) for an independent Armenia in the six provinces—namely Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Harput,

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[114] Hugh Seton-Watson, "Milliyetçilik ve Çok Milletli İmparatorluklar," *Belleten*, translated by Y. T. Kurat, Vol. 28, no 111 (July 1964), s. 538-539.

[115] Dadrian, *ibid.*, p. 62.

Diyarbakır and Sivas—of the Empire. After Abdulhamit, the last years of the Ottoman Empire were shaped by *Ittihat ve Terakki* Party (Union and Progress Party). The Union and Progress Party that forced Abdulhamit II to reopen the Assembly dismissed in 1877 in 1908 wanted to create a western-style democratic regime. Such major development required time and professional cadres. The Union and Progress Party had none of them since wars and internal rebellions did not give them enough peaceful periods, and since most of the members of the party were not as professional and many as the job required.[116] As the Ottoman Empire was plunged into the Great War, it lost its power to revitalize itself.[117] *"The war and its aftermath had let loose an orgy of imperialist expansion among the victors."*[118] A new national state was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk for the Turks, and rest of the Empire was mapped by the Allies.

Conclusions

For centuries, the Ottoman way of governing multi-ethnic and religious communities in some of the most troubled regions of the world would have contained both appreciations and dissatisfactions. In a time of vast religious biases in the high middle ages in Europe, such as anti-Semitism, the Ottomans presented mild and more advanced ruling abilities for all the subjects. The Christians, the Jews and other non-Muslims had a safe environment provided by the Ottomans.

Although the Ottomans collected some taxes—most importantly *cizye*—from the non-Muslims, they exempted them from military and official duties, as the Islamic laws required. Because of their free and large rights in dealing with economic, judicial, educational, social and cultural matters, non-Muslims of the Empire were generally richer, more socialized and more educated than their Muslim counterparts. They were quicker than the Muslims in accepting changes in technological, social, cultural and economical matters. For example, the non-Muslims had their printing press towards the end of the sixteenth century while the Muslims had their first printing press in the first half of the eighteenth century. Besides, the Muslims paid taxes that were as big as the non-Muslims paid. In addition to their taxes, the Muslims had to serve in the army and in official posts, which put weighty burdens on them. Since the Ottoman laws required all the subjects to pay their taxes and perform their duties, they presented a state of law and somewhat a state of equality.

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[116] General Von der Goltz, *1912-1913 Balkan Harbi Barışından Sonra Osmanlı Yönetimi Üzerinde Düşünceler*, İstanbul: Harb Akademileri Basımevi, 1970, s. 9-11.

[117] Karpat, *Türk Demokrasi Tarihi*, s. 48.

[118] Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire.* p. 327.

Better position of the non-Muslims, compared to contemporary neighboring Christian states' minorities, started to change in the modern times. Although the minorities in Europe did not receive satisfied positions up until the second half of the twentieth century, the Ottoman minorities considered their position worse. In this, the rising power of European big powers' politics in international politics played important role. Outside pressures gradually increased in the empire. As her weakness deepened, the problems within the empire grew. One of the worst problems was minority problem.

In the rise of the minority problems, many developments played roles. First of all, the Ottomans failed to make necessary changes as the time required. In Europe, such developments as Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, French Revolution and finally Industrial Revolution had made fundamental changes in administrations, religious affairs, social and cultural structures. Such ideas as humanity, freedom, democracy, nationalism, human rights, constitutional rights, individualism and liberty increasingly affected public and governmental lives. When these ideas entered the Ottoman Empire, the rulers had difficulty dealing with them. As a result, these ideas moved the minorities to revolt against the Empire.

The Ottoman full sovereignty in administration and her shaping of internal and external affairs gradually became an impossible task because of both treaties and capitulations given to the European big powers in various times. The big powers increasingly interfered in the Empire's affairs. They were after their economic, social, cultural and military gains. In order to earn these gains, they from time to time did not hesitate to go war or align with minority groups to create problems against the Ottomans. The big powers—especially Russia—saw the Empire as "Eastern Question" and as a "sick man of Europe." They eagerly waited, and some time accelerated, her to die in order to divide her legacy. By this way, the Ottoman rule deteriorated in the nineteenth century.

In order to solve problems, the Ottomans tried to reform institutions. The reforms—especially *Tanzimat* reforms—were designed to minimize external interferences and to gain fatefulness of the minorities to the state. Despite important developments in improving administrative structures to include all the citizens within the governmental jobs and all the subjects as equals before the laws, neither the minorities nor the Muslims were satisfied. While the first groups always demanded more "rights" and were not satisfied with short of the full independence, the later scorned from loosing their old status and becoming equals with the minorities.

Because of large internal and external problems—such as minority risings, imperialist demands, majority scorns, corrupt institutions, state weaknesses and

outside fast unreachable changes—the last years of the Ottoman Empire were difficult years for both the majority and the minority. In order to overcome these difficulties, the Ottomans would have done with their best abilities to reform institutions. They opened their doors for outside observers, consuls, teachers, missionaries, politicians and others to make necessary changes. However, all these efforts failed to solve problems and to keep the state intact. In this failure, unconquerable demands of both minorities and the big powers played decisive roles.

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