



HISTORY STUDIES

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HISTORY

ISSN: 1309 4173 / (Online) 1309 - 4688 (Print)

Volume: 15, Issue: 2, May 2023

www.historystudies.net

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY UPRISINGS IN THE OTTOMAN BALKANS

Osmanlı Balkanlarında On Dokuzuncu Yüzyıl Ayaklanmaları

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ceren Uçan 

Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi

ceren.ucan@deu.edu.tr

Makale Türü-*Article Type* : Araştırma Makalesi-Research Article
Geliş Tarihi-*Received Date* : 04/11/2022
Kabul Tarihi-*Accepted Date* : 24/03/2023
DOI Number  : 10.9737/hist.2023.1128

Atıf – Citation:

Ceren Uçan, "The Nineteenth-Century Uprisings in the Ottoman Balkans," *History Studies*, 15/2, Mayıs 2023, s. 221-235.



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Öz

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, on altıncı yüzyıldan itibaren dünya ekonomisi ve teknolojisi değiştiğçe tebaasıyla ilişkilerinde zorluklarla karşılaştı. Bu değişiklikler reayanın yaşam koşullarında bir gerilemeye yol açtı. Mali kriz, tımar sisteminin çözülmesi, çiftliklerin yükselişi ve taşradaki yöneticilerin, yeniçerilerin, ayanların ve eşkıyaların suiistimalleri nedeniyle reaya sürekli güvensizlik ve yoksulluk içinde yaşadı. Bu arada, imparatorluğun Avrupa topraklarındaki Ortodoks toplulukların orta sınıfları 18. yüzyılda gelişti. Artık reaya statülerinden memnun değillerdi ve imparatorluğun altyapı eksikliği ve mali istikrarsızlığından hoşnut değillerdi. Sırp, Yunan ve Bulgar ayaklanmalarının ilk aşamaları Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun mevcut koşullarına tepkiydi. On dokuzuncu yüzyılın ikinci yarısında ise, kendi toplumlarındaki yeni orta sınıfın üyeleri olan ulusal aydınlar milliyetçiliği desteklemiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ayanlar, Balkanlar, Çiftlikler, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, İsyanlar

Abstract

The Ottoman Empire faced challenges in its relationships with its subjects as the world economy and technology changed from the sixteenth century onwards. These changes led to a decline in living conditions for the reaya. The reaya lived in constant insecurity and poverty because of the financial crisis, the disintegration of the tımar system, the rise of the çiftliks, and abuses of provincial administrators, janissaries, ayans, and bandits that were ravishing the countryside. Meanwhile, the middle classes in Orthodox communities in the empire's European territories thrived in the 18th century. They were no longer satisfied with their reaya status and displeased with the lack of infrastructure and financial instability of the empire. The initial phases of the Serbian, Greek, and Bulgarian uprisings were reactions to the current conditions of the Ottoman Empire. Whereas, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the national intelligentsia, who were members of the new middle class in their respective societies promoted nationalism.

Keywords: Ayans, Balkans, Çiftliks, Ottoman Empire, Uprisings

Introduction

As part of nation-building efforts, the intelligentsia in Southeastern European nation-states created discourses that the nineteenth-century revolts in the Ottoman Empire were patriotic nationalist uprisings in pursuit of independence. To this day these discourses stand as the foundation of their respective population's sense of identity and past. They are also the sources of irredentist claims and contemporary disputes in the Balkans. The uprisings of Orthodox Christians in the nineteenth-century Balkans broke out as reactions to the Ottoman Empire's inability to provide its people with economic well-being and security. They were not manifestations of masses to establish nation-states. On the one hand, the rising middle class demanded rights and protection for their properties. They were displeased with the lack of infrastructure and security in the empire. On the other hand, the *reaya* was living in constant insecurity and poverty because of the financial crisis, the rise of the *çiftlik*s, exploitations by the officials and janissaries, and banditry. The empire's relationship with its subjects was challenged by the disintegration of the *timar* system, economic, and political crises. The initial uprisings of the *reaya* in the Balkans were responses to the Ottoman Empire's failure to provide wealth and security for its subjects. It was after 1830 that national discourses were created.

Roger V. Paxton and Victor Roudometof deny that the nineteenth-century uprisings of the Orthodox Christians in the Balkans were motivated by nationalism. Paxton defends that nationalism has to be indoctrinated for generations in each member of society through education and propaganda and these conditions did not exist in the 1804 Serbian uprising.¹ Whereas Roudometof states that in the nineteenth-century Balkans, the majority of people identified themselves as members of a religion, not a nation.² He explains that throughout the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Orthodox communities flourished by being intermediaries between Western merchants and Ottoman markets. Therefore, they wanted to reconstitute the empire as a multi-ethnic state which then would allow them to change their *reaya* status and be more influential.³ He explains in another article that between 1830 and 1880, the intelligentsia in Serbia and Greece created a "secular national identity" and a "national discourse".⁴ These creations of nation-building are still the reference points for these countries' citizens in terms of national identity, perception of their past, and sense of belonging.⁵ This paper views uprisings in the Balkans not as resurrections or manifestations of "indigenous national spirit"⁶. In this sense, it supports the arguments of Roger V. Paxton and Victor Roudometof. It claims that only members of the new middle class were influenced by nationalist ideology. Economic, political, and military changes in the Ottoman Empire were factors in the Balkan uprisings.

1. Transformation in the Ottoman Provincial Administration from the Late Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries

The Ottoman economy started to experience difficulties by the late sixteenth century due to changes in the trade routes and the flow of silver into Europe with the discovery of the New World. The shifting of trade routes from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic declined the trade revenues of the Ottoman Empire drastically. The flow of silver found its way to Ottoman markets

¹ Roger V. Paxton, "Nationalism and Revolution: A Re-Examination of the Origins of the First Serbian Insurrection 1804-1807", *East European Quarterly*, VI/6, (September 1972): 362.

² Victor Roudometof, "Nationalism, Globalization, Eastern Orthodoxy: 'Unthinking' the 'Clash of Civilizations' in Southeastern Europe", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2/2, (1999): 237.

³ Roudometof, "Nationalism, Globalization, Eastern Orthodoxy" 238.

⁴ Victor Roudometof, "Invented Traditions, Symbolic Boundaries, And National Identity In Southeastern Europe: Greece and Serbia in Comparative Historical Perspective (1830-1880)", *East European Quarterly* XXXII/4 (January 1999): 429.

⁵ Roudometof, "Invented Traditions", 429.

⁶ Kemal H. Karpat, eds., *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey*. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 246.

and caused monetary inflation. To fight inflation, in 1585, the Ottoman government reduced the amount of currency in circulation and devalued the silver *akçe*.⁷ However, this policy further accelerated inflation. The Ottoman government continued to devalue *akçe* frequently as a remedy to the budget deficit.⁸ Monetary devaluation resulted in the acceleration of inflation, disruption of business transactions, and nurturing distrust of the government among the subjects.⁹

Another method of the empire to overcome fiscal pressure was to raise taxes, make temporary taxes permanent, and redirect tax incomes to the central budget which used to belong to local administrations. For example, in the fifteenth century, the *cizye* levied at the rate of 50 *akçes* per annum on average, in the course of the sixteenth century the *cizye* increased to 80-85 *akçes*. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the *cizye* increased drastically, “at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the *cizye* was levied at 170 to 230 *akçes*; by the middle of the century, it was at 300-350 *akçes*; and by the end of the century, the rate stood at more than 400 *akçes*”.¹⁰ In addition to the *cizye*, the Christians had the burden of ecclesiastical taxes and were responsible to pay the salaries of the tax farmers like other non-Moslems.¹¹ In the Balkan countryside, the peasants started to lose their land because of high taxations:

“By the late seventeenth century taxes often reached over 80 percent of the peasant land’s productive value; in some cases, they exceeded the total value. To meet the crushing tax burden, peasant households or villages often resorted to borrowing cash from local landholders using their lands as collateral. When they defaulted (as they often did), they lost their lands and found themselves tied to the lenders’ *çiftlik*”.¹²

The developments in the sixteenth-century war technology, undermined the importance of the *sipahis* in the Ottoman army while soldiers using firearms became indispensable. The Ottoman administration pursued the policy of increasing the number of janissaries throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whereas it was around 10-12.000 in the fifteenth century, it increased to 70.000 in the course of three centuries.¹³ This enormous raise was extremely burdensome for the central treasury.¹⁴ To increase state revenues, the central government began to amass *timar* lands that fell vacant. The revenues of these lands began to be farmed out by *iltizâm*.¹⁵ *Ayans* and provincial governors managed to become *mültezims*. Furthermore, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the empire employed *ayans* as *muhasşils* and *mütesellims* to integrate them into the state strata. By doing so, it unintentionally empowered the *ayans*.¹⁶ From the end of the sixteenth century onward, the *iltizâm* system spread rapidly in the provinces which created a strong *mültezim* class. Many of the *ayans* of the eighteenth century rose from this group of *mültezims* with large *mukâtaa* ‘a or *khâss* revenues under its control.¹⁷

In the later part of the sixteenth century, the palace favorites, bureaucrats, janissaries, and anyone who had connections in bureaucracy confiscated *timar* lands.¹⁸ By bribing bureaucrats

⁷ Şevket Pamuk, *Osmanlı-Türkiye İktisadi Tarihi 1500-1914*. (İstanbul: İletişim, 2007), 113-121.

⁸ Pamuk, *Osmanlı-Türkiye*, 120.

⁹ Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Balkans: From Constantinople to Communism*. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 164-65.

¹⁰ Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kısve Bahası Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670-1730*. (Boston, Brill: 2004), 95.

¹¹ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam*. 95.

¹² Hupchick, *The Balkans*, 166.

¹³ Selim Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp İsyanları: 19. Yüzyılın Şafağında Balkanlar* (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2007), 41.

¹⁴ Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp*, 41.

¹⁵ Halil İnalçık, “Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1700”, *Archivum Ottomanicum* 6 (1980): 283-337.

¹⁶ Reşat Kasaba, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Dünya Ekonomisi On Dokuzuncu Yüzyıl* (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1993), 20.

¹⁷ İnalçık, “Military and Fiscal”, 283-337.

¹⁸ Traian Stoianovich, “Land Tenure and Related Sectors of the Balkan Economy, 1600-1800”, *The Journal of Economic History* (Autumn 1953): 398.



they legalized the right of hereditary to *timars*, and transferred *timars* into civil holdings, *mülk*, *mâlikâne*, and *wakfs*.¹⁹ The *ayans* were among those who confiscated *timar* lands. They turned these lands into market-oriented estates (*çiftliks*) and forced their tenants to raise cash crops.²⁰ The *çiftliks* which appeared in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries became widespread during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The *çiftlik* owner was holding the land as heritable property and was able to evict the peasants as he wished. Also, rents on the *çiftliks* were higher than on the *timars*. With the emergence of large holdings, *çiftliks* became the main factor of revolts in the Balkans in the nineteenth century as the peasants who were forced to work in *çiftlik* lands were exposed to services and tithes that were burdensome and higher than what had been levied by the central government.²¹

The central government encouraged the provincial administrations to have their forces that were skilled at using firearms. This policy paved the way for *ayans* to have their armed forces. These forces were terrorizing the country side at times they were unemployed.²² The *ayans* were acting as autonomous regional rulers. By the late eighteenth century, the Balkans was under the control of *ayans*: Pazvandoğlu in Vidin, Tirsiniklioğlu İsmail in and around Ruse and Shumen, İsmail Bey in Serres, Tepedelenli Ali Paşa in Albania and Peloponnese Region, Yılıkoğlu Süleyman Ağa in Silistra and Ludogorie region, Buşatlı Mahmud Paşa in North Albania, Avlonyalı İbrahim Paşa in mid-Albania.²³

The *ayans* struggled with each other and with the state to extend their area of influence. This constant power struggle and banditry forced reâyâ to move to safer places in the Balkans.²⁴ In 1800 one of the most powerful *ayans*, Pasvandoğlu Osman Paşa, a landholder from Vidin, briefly seized Belgrade and in the following years, his allies seized control of Serbia. Most of the recruits of the forces sent by the Ottoman central government against them were bandits who did more looting than fighting. The damage done by Pasvandoğlu, his allies, and the Ottoman forces contributed to the occurrence of the Serbian rebellion in 1804.²⁵

Another grievance was the arbitrary acts of the janissaries. For example, in Sanjak of Semendire, the janissaries became the strongest military force. In 1750, there were 5.039 janissaries in Belgrade.²⁶ The janissaries started to confiscate the lands under the tenure of peasants. The abuses of the janissaries were so extensive that some of the peasants abandoned their lands and became bandits.²⁷

Orthodox merchant classes existed in the Balkans since the fourteenth century. However, they became wealthy and numerous in the eighteenth century.²⁸ As underlined by Kemal Karpat, “the breakdown of the timar system and the social order based on it” took place throughout the empire.²⁹ However, the new social order started first in the western part of the empire. Because

¹⁹ Stoianovich, 398.

²⁰ Kasaba, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, 28.

²¹ Hupchick, *The Balkans*, 167.

²² Kasaba, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, 21.

²³ Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp*, 52.

²⁴ Nagehan Üstündağ, *Power Politics in the Ottoman Balkan Provinces: A Case Study of Pazvandoğlu Osman* (Unpublished Masters of Arts Thesis) (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 2006), 34.

²⁵ Hupchick, *The Balkans*, 180.

²⁶ Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp*, 43.

²⁷ Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp*, 43.

²⁸ Traian Stoianovich, “The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant”, *The Journal of Economic History* (Jun 1960): 234.

²⁹ Kemal H. Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History Selected Articles and Essays*. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 343.

in the eighteenth century, commercial and cultural relations with the West paved the way for the empowerment of the commercial middle class and a nationalist intelligentsia in the Balkans.³⁰

2. The Serbian Uprisings

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the number of janissaries settled in Sanjak of Semendire increased and they became the strongest military force. They were abusing the *reaya*, confiscating their lands, and taxing them unlawfully. To escape from the abuses of the janissaries, some left their lands and became bandits. In 1741, the locals petitioned the Sublime Porte about the unlawful activities of janissaries. The empire took action to stop the abuses including executing janissaries. However, its attempts were jeopardized by a janissary rebellion. After the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774, the Ottoman Empire tried to consolidate its power by declaring that it was forbidden to turn miri lands into *çiftlik*s in the Sanjak of Semendire. However, it was unsuccessful. By 1788, the majority of the lands in the Sanjak were turned into *çiftlik*s by janissaries.³¹ The empire retried to consolidate its power and free the *reaya* from the abuses of janissaries in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-1792. Ebu Bekir Pasha was appointed as the military governor of Belgrade. He turned janissaries' *çiftlik*s to miri lands and exiled them from the sanjak. The exiled janissaries went to Vidin and got under Pazvandoğlu Osman's protection.³² They were to challenge the empire's authority numerous times including sieging the Belgrade fortress for more than a decade.³³

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Hungary, Banat, and Slovenia declined to export pigs. Instead, they started to produce and export more grains because they were in high demand in the western markets. These producers were replaced by the Serbs of Šumadija. In producing and exporting pigs Šumadija became the main supplier of pigs in the region. Two agreements contributed to the rise of livestock merchants of Šumadija: a trade agreement between Austria and the Ottoman Empire in 1784 and the Treaty of Sistova in 1791. Whereas the former "liberalized trade relations between the two empires", the latter granted Serbs of the Belgrade Pashalik "the right to sell whatever goods they possessed to whomever they desired".³⁴ Serbian *reaya* of Šumadija, Belgrade, and Vojvodina gained wealth by selling sheep, cattle, and pigs to Hungary, Austria, and the Austrian armies during the wars of the French Revolution.³⁵ As *çiftlik*s made it harder for the *reaya* to continue farming, more and more started to breed and trade pigs. By the end of the eighteenth century, exporting pigs became the major export, replacing cattle and wax.³⁶ In the early nineteenth century, three million francs worth of pigs and cattle were exported annually to Austria.³⁷ The leaders of the Serbian uprising, Djordje Petrović (known as Karadjordje), Mladen Milovanović, and Milan Obrenović were to come out of this new merchant class.³⁸

The earliest of the revolts in the Balkans was the first Serbian uprising. Although there were some disruptions, from 1741 to 1804, the central Ottoman administration fought with *ayans*, *yamaks*, and *dayıs* to undermine their power, return confiscated lands to the *reaya*, and bring back order. The First Serbian Uprising (1804-1813) broke out under the leadership of illiterate

³⁰ Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman*, 344.

³¹ Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp*, 42-43.

³² Selim Aslantaş, "Sırp İsyanlarına Giden Yol (1788-1804)", *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları* (HÜTAD) 3 (2005): 122-124.

³³ Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp*, 54-65.

³⁴ Stoianovich, "The Conquering", 282-283.

³⁵ Stoianovich, "The Conquering", 282-283.

³⁶ Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp*, 45.

³⁷ Stoianovich, "The Conquering", 283.

³⁸ Aslantaş, "Sırp İsyanlarına", 136.

livestock dealer Djordje Petrović (known as Karadjordje)³⁹ after the beheading of local *knezes* (Serbian chiefs) by the *yamaks*.⁴⁰ Initially, in 1804, the rebels desired to return to provincial administration practices of earlier centuries. The *reaya*, *sipahis*, and merchants acted to consolidate the power of the Sultan and stop abuses of the janissaries.⁴¹ Historian Dimitrije Djordjević describes the conditions that stimulated the first Serbian uprising: “The growing social and political anarchy, the transition from the timar to the çiftlik (chiflik) system, the abuses of local officials, and the steady increase in feudal obligations made the peasant’s survival as a class a serious question”.⁴² Selim Aslantaş describes the uprising as an act to end the cruel *dayıs* regime and that it is not possible to take it as a national independence movement. Aslantaş states that only after Russia got involved, political demands came into the scene.⁴³

After the rebellion broke out, in May 1804, rebels and *dayıs* met at Zemun for reconciliation. It failed as *dayıs* refused to leave Belgrade. Before the meeting, the rebel leaders Karadjordje, Mladen Milovanović, Milan Obrenović, Janko Katić, Protta Mateja Nenadović, Stanoje Glavaš, Vasa Čarapić, Sima Maeković, and Serbian merchants who did trade in Austria and were providing arms to the rebels met at Ostrujnitsa camp near Belgrade to formulate their demands. The meeting and the formulated demands are significant to prove that the rebellion was not a nationalist revolution but rather an uprising to stop abuses and bring order to the provincial administration. The text is also significant to demonstrate the abuses the *reaya* endured for decades. The demands were:

“the expulsion of *dayıs* Mehmed Foçoğlu, Molla Yusuf, Küçük Ali, Ağanlı Hüseyin Bayraktar, Musa Ağa and Yusuf Hacı Klimentoğlu from Belgrade, not to have any others to be appointed as *dayıs* and confiscation of the çiftliks; establishment of a military force of 1500 people from Serbs under pasha’s command for the protection of the pasha and *reaya* until the arrival of Sultan’s army from Istanbul; Sultan’s forgiveness for *reaya* who took part in the revolt and not to have any Muslims to abuse *reaya* implicitly or explicitly for taking part in the revolt; not to make *reaya* to have more obligations and pay taxes other than *cizye*, *haraç*, *öşür* which he would pay without any protest; appointment of skilled *kadis* who would hold trials based on the law and would not take advantage of *reaya*, conducting fixing and maintenance of churches and monasteries that are in ruins freely in accordance to rights given at the time of Hacı Mustafa Pasha without any disruption from *voyvodas*, *sipahis*, and *kadis*; prevention of Muslims to go to Serbian weddings, interfere with marriages, and force girls to get married with someone they do not want to get married to; non disturbance of priests and monks; freedom for *reaya* to sell crops to whoever pays more and freedom to merchants to do trade in *nahias*; freedom for *reaya* to choose *knezes*, and *knezes* to be recognized as the representatives of *reaya* by *muhafız*, and be accountable by *kadis*; freedom for *knezes* to choose a leader as the representative of Serbian *reaya*, and him to be with the *muhafız* permanently, and collection of taxes by *knezes*”.⁴⁴

Furthermore, if the Ottoman Empire honored this request, they promised that they would sacrifice their lives for the state and show that they were the most loyal *reaya* to the state.⁴⁵ The demands demonstrate the inability of the state to protect and secure its *reaya*. They expose arbitrary rule of local administration from janissaries to *kadis*. The abuses were so extensive that they impacted every aspect of the *reaya*’s life. The change in classical methods of production and trade, the rise of the middle class, and the part it played in the uprising are also evident. The rebellion leaders

³⁹ Lawrence P. Meriage, “The First Serbian Uprising (1804-1813) and the Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Eastern Question”, *Slavic Review* 37/3 (September 1978): 422.

⁴⁰ Victor Roudometof, “Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy”, 24.

⁴¹ Meriage, “The First”, 422.

⁴² Wayne S. Vucinich, ed. *The First Serbian Uprising 1804-1813* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1982), 362.

⁴³ Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp*, 16.

⁴⁴ Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp*, 82-83. The text is translated from its Turkish translation in *Osmanlıda Sırp İsyanları: 19. Yüzyılın Şafağında Balkanlar* to English by the author of this article.

⁴⁵ Aslantaş, *Osmanlıda Sırp*, 83.

and the financiers of the uprising were merchants. Therefore, they tried to abolish the rules that restricted trade. They demanded the reaya to freely sell their crops to whoever offered the highest price, and merchants to trade freely in the nahiyas.

With the Treaty of Adrianople signed on 29 September 1829, Serbia was granted autonomy. *Načertanije*, the national program was formed forty years after the first Serbian uprising. Peter Von Sivers, discusses that constitutional and ethnic nationalism existed marginally in the Greek rebellion. However, nationalism of any sort was even less apparent in the two Serbian uprisings (1804-13 and 1815-17).⁴⁶ He states:

“...insurgents, rebels, brigands, outlaws, and assorted followers who morphed into ruling classes were the independence leaders in Greece and Serbia. Ethnic independence programs-read back into more or less mythical past-and citizenries as the representatives of ethnic and constitutional nationalism emerged only after a considerable lapse of time in both countries”.⁴⁷

Nationalist ideologies gained momentum in Serbian and Greek uprisings not at the very beginning but rather towards the second half of the century. National programs, *Načertanije* (Program) and *Megale Idea* (Great Idea) were elaborated during the early 1840s, years after the initial revolts. *Načertanije* was written by Ilija Garašanin, Minister of Internal Affairs, in 1844, envisioning Serbia as an independent state for the first time.⁴⁸ He was the son of a wealthy merchant and was a member of the Constitutionalist Party, composed of livestock traders, merchants, government officials, and landowners.⁴⁹ The program was designed under Prince Adam Czartoryski’s (a Polish immigrant leader in Paris), and later Franje Zah’s (a Pan-Slav Czech) consultation.⁵⁰ Czartoryski aimed to take advantage of the contemporary situation in the Balkans to grant support from the European empires for an independent Poland. Therefore, he supported Anglo-French interests and promoted anti-Russian policies.⁵¹ Also, Czartoryski and other Polish agents acted as intermediates between the European states and Belgrade.⁵² *Načertanije* was expansionist and irredentist:

*“Serbia must place herself in the ranks of other European states, creating a plan for her future...Movement and agitation among the Slavs has already begun and will, indeed never cease. Serbia must well understand this movement along with the role or the assignment which she will have in it. ...she will realize that she is still very small, that she must not remain in such position, ... From this knowledge the plan and the foundation originate of Serbia’s policy which does not limit Serbia to her present borders, but endeavors to attach to her all the neighboring Serbian peoples”.*⁵³

Contrary to the demands of the rebels in the initial phase of the Serbian uprising in 1804, *Načertanije* envisioned an independent Serbian state based on ethnicity with an irredentist policy.

3. The Greek Uprising

The developments in world trade, international politics, and migration within the Ottoman Empire and its neighbors in the second half of the eighteenth century paved the way for the Greek middle-class formation. The Greek merchants benefited from the turmoil following the French Revolution. The Ottoman Empire only briefly (1798-1801) took part in the Napoleonic wars. This

⁴⁶ Hakan Yavuz and Isa Blumi, eds. *War and Nationalism: the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913, and Their Sociopolitical Implications* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2013), xxviii.

⁴⁷ Yavuz and Blumi, *War and Nationalism*, xxv.

⁴⁸ Edislav Manetovic, “Ilija Garasanin: Nacertanije and Nationalism”, *Historical Review* (January 2008): 140.

⁴⁹ Paul N. Hehn, “The Origins of Modern Pan-Serbism-The 1844 *Načertanije* of Ilija Garašanin: An Analysis and Translation”, *East European Quarterly* IX/2 (Summer 1975): 153.

⁵⁰ Hehn, “The Origins”, 153-55.

⁵¹ Hehn, “The Origins”, 154-55.

⁵² Hehn, “The Origins”, 154.

⁵³ Ilija Garašanin, “The *Načertanije* (Draft): The Programme of Serbian Foreign and National Policy at the End of 1844”, [http:// helsinki.org.rs/doc/nacertanije.doc](http://helsinki.org.rs/doc/nacertanije.doc), (5 Apr. 2014 trans. D.T. Batakovic).

allowed the Greek sailors to replace their European counterparts. Unfortunately, the Ottoman Empire itself could not financially benefit from its subjects' success in becoming leading actors in Mediterranean trade for most of this trade was illegal. On the contrary, the smuggling of its grain caused scarcity and inflation in the empire. The Greek merchants and sailors formed a smuggling network carrying goods from the Ottoman Empire to European markets.⁵⁴

The central government's control over any sort of forces of production in its lands had been loosened since the late sixteenth century. The empire's major grain supplier was Egypt. Because of Egypt's occupation by the French, the empire was deprived of its major source to feed its subjects. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the price of wheat quadrupled in Europe. Greek merchants and sailors smuggled forty percent of the grain produced in Macedonia and Thessalia to European markets which damaged the Ottoman economy enormously. Also, cotton, grape, tobacco, corn, and livestock were all in high demand in the European markets because of industrialization. The Greek merchants and sailors were also in control of exporting these commodities as well.⁵⁵

Because the center of commerce shifted to the Atlantic, and Europe grew wealthier and industrialized, the Jews residing in the Ottoman Empire started to immigrate to the west in the seventeenth century. This freed the Greek merchants from any competition in the Balkans. Some members of the Greek merchant families immigrated to Russia and Europe.⁵⁶ In the early eighteenth century, many moved to Austria from Epirus, Macedonia, and the Ionian Islands.⁵⁷ They settled in trade capitals and further expanded their zone of influence by establishing a trade network between the Ottoman Empire and Europe.⁵⁸ Having been exposed to European enlightenment earlier than any others in the Balkans, the Greeks started to pass over this cultural exchange to the rest of the Orthodox Christians.⁵⁹

The Greek revolt broke out with the efforts of the new Greek middle class that emerged during the eighteenth century. This new middle class was not only in favor of a nationalist movement but also the leaders of the movement came out of this class.⁶⁰ The movement did not receive support from the Patriarchate.⁶¹ Greek merchants were influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution through their trade networks. They were impressed by the infrastructural and intellectual developments in the western countries they encountered during their mercantile activities. Besides, the Greek middle class was highly displeased with the current situation of the Ottoman Empire: "they had little use for a government that was unable to maintain roads, curb brigands, or prevent the open and never-ending extortions of its officials".⁶² Therefore, the merchants organized the Philike Hetairia revolutionary society in 1814 at Odessa, the place of the largest Greek merchant colony in Russia, and worked on preparing for the revolutionary outbreak.⁶³ Dmitrije Drordjević mentions that historians generally recognize the role of a national factor in the Greek revolution not because of the characteristics of the Greek peasants which resembled any other group of Balkan peasantry but because of the upper classes of Greek society. He states that Rigas Feraios, Adamantios Korais, Alexandros Mavrokordatos, and other intellectuals promoted the ideas of the French Revolution and nationalism. But these ideas were only embraced by upper-class members as indicated by membership rates to Philike Hetairia. The

⁵⁴ Kasaba, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, 23-24.

⁵⁵ Kasaba, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, 23.

⁵⁶ Stoianovich, "The Conquering", 244-46.

⁵⁷ İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), 74.

⁵⁸ Kasaba, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, 24-30.

⁵⁹ Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun*, p. 74.

⁶⁰ L.S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1958), 145.

⁶¹ Karpat, *Ottoman Past*, 163-65.

⁶² Stavrianos, *The Balkans*, 145.

⁶³ Stavrianos, *The Balkans*, 278.

largest group was merchants with 53.7 percent, 13.1 percent of the members were free professionals, 11.7 percent were provincial notables, 9.5 percent were clergymen and only 0.6 percent were peasants.⁶⁴

The revolt began in 1821 in the Danubian Principalities under the leadership of Ypsilantis a merchant from a well-known Phanariote family. Dennis Hupchick underlined that the leaders of the uprising were acting like bandits with no concept of nationalism and that the uprising resembled a bandit movement rather than a national revolution: “Most had no concept of nationalist ideals and acted simply in the time-honored fashion of brigands, seeking freedom from local Ottoman authority and booty from Muslim civilians, thousands of whom they slaughtered or drove out”.⁶⁵ The Greek peasants contributed to the uprising because of the anarchy that prevailed in the countryside. Especially, the autocracies committed by Tepedenli Ali, a powerful *ayan*, who was appointed as pasha in Ioannina (1788), and his forces that raided neighboring regions. Tepedenli expanded his control over most of Macedonia and mainland Greece, all of Morea, the Ionian Islands, and southern Albania until being destroyed by the Ottoman army in 1822, following its declaration of independence from the empire in 1819.⁶⁶

With the London Protocol issued in 1830, Greece became an independent monarchical state under the guaranteed protection of Britain, Russia, and France. The territory of the Greek state was restricted to a little more than the Peloponnese, Attica, and the Cyclades islands, leaving the majority of the Greek population within the territory of the Ottoman Empire. This led irredentism to become a prominent factor in the politics of Greece. Until signing the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, the state policy was to pursue *Megali Idea*.⁶⁷ For its supporters, it meant a unified single state of all Greek settlements in the Near East with Constantinople as its capital. *Megali Idea* was mentioned for the first time by Ioannis Kolettis, the Greek Prime Minister before the constituent assembly in 1844. He described a native of the Greek kingdom as someone “who lives in Ioannina, in Thessaly, in Serres, in Adrianople, in Constantinople, in Trebizond, in Crete, in Samos and any land associated with Greek history or the Greek race”.⁶⁸ With this statement, he described a Greek kingdom with borders far beyond the present kingdom. The present Greek kingdom was “not the whole of Greece, but only a part, the smallest and poorest part”.⁶⁹

4. Bulgarian Uprising

The basic factor behind Bulgarian unrest was the weakening of central authority and exploitation of the *reaya*. In Vidin, the imperial *hass* was the largest in the Balkans. The *çiftliks* were very extensive and Pazvandoğlu Osman owned most of them in the last quarter of the 18th century.⁷⁰ The incidents that occurred in the Bulgarian lands due to the loss of Ottoman central authority are as follows: the devastation of the countryside by armed bandits in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, abuses of government officials and *ayans*, and the rise of the *çiftliks*. The peasants responded to these incidents by revolting and fleeing to the mountain areas. Rebellions broke out in the northwest in 1835, at Niş in 1841, Ibrail between 1841 and 1842, and Vidin in 1850.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Béla K. Király, and Gunther E. Rothenberg, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. I* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1979), 201.

⁶⁵ Hupchick, *The Balkans*, 221.

⁶⁶ Hupchick, *The Balkans*, 180.

⁶⁷ Hupchick, *The Balkans*, 222-23.

⁶⁸ Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 48.

⁶⁹ Clogg, *A Concise*, 48.

⁷⁰ Üstündağ, *Power Politics*, 43-45.

⁷¹ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume II: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 160.

The Bulgarian merchant class was formed in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Bulgarian traders and carters from the Rhodope and the Balkan Mountains began to travel to Russia and Hungary in 1750. However, the Bulgarian merchant class only became strong after the *reaya* of the Rhodope and Balkan Mountains moved in masses to foothills, valleys, and coastlands that were abandoned because of banditry in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth century.⁷² The Bulgarian merchants formed wealthy colonies in major trade centers of the empire such as Constantinople, Smyrna, and Salonica as well as European centers such as Vienna, Moscow, and Petersburg.⁷³

Merchants established trade schools. History, geography, and mathematics were taught and students were exposed to European political thought.⁷⁴ Also, foreign countries and other Orthodox communities contributed to the Bulgarian intellectual movement. While Bulgarian students attended Serbian schools in Belgrade and Bulgarian books were printed by the Serbian government's official press, the liberal Western ideas reached the Bulgarian middle class indirectly through the Greeks as the majority of educated Bulgarians attended Greek schools in Smyrna, Athens, Saloniki, Yanina, and in the various Aegean Islands until the mid-nineteenth century. Between 1856 and 1876 around five hundred Bulgarian students received scholarships from the Slavonic Benevolent Committee to study in Russia to indoctrinate the Bulgarian students with Pan-Slav, Orthodox ideas.⁷⁵

As discussed, the uprisings of the *reaya* in the northwest in 1835, at Niş in 1841, Ibrail between 1841 and 1842, and Vidin in 1850 took place because of the deprived conditions of *reaya*. However, the *reaya* did not have any nationalist political agenda and did not support any independence movements. Therefore, leaders of the Bulgarian nationalist movement were based in Serbia and Danubian Principalities. They were either simply allowed to conduct their nationalist activities or vigorously supported. For example, since the 1860's George Rakovski, one of the leaders had headquarters of his organization in Belgrade and Novi Sad.⁷⁶

The Bulgarian nationalists were actively aided by Russia. Since the end of the 1828-1829 Ottoman-Russo war, Russian agents had been active in Bulgaria.⁷⁷ Their efforts intensified shortly before 1850.⁷⁸ They were distributing pamphlets and organized secret gatherings to promote rebellion.⁷⁹ The pamphlets distributed by them were openly inviting the *reaya* to rebel against the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁰ Ignatiev also mobilized brigand groups to enter the Tuna province and start a rebellion.⁸¹ It was Nikolai Pavlovich Ignat'ev who pressed for the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate.⁸² Its establishment in 1870 by Sultan Abdülaziz marked the acceleration of Bulgarian nationalism. The exarchate's priests roamed the countryside to spread Bulgarian nationalism.⁸³ Ignatiev also ensured that the Slavic Benevolent Committee gave grants to Bulgarian instructors to pursue higher education in Moscow. After returning to their local communities, these

⁷² Stoianovich, "The Conquering", 281.

⁷³ Halil İnalçık, *Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi* (İstanbul: Eren Yayıncılık ve Kitapçılık Ltd. Şti., 1992), 21.

⁷⁴ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman*, 161.

⁷⁵ Stavrianos, *The Balkans*, 369-70.

⁷⁶ Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804-1920/36* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), 136.

⁷⁷ M. Hüdai Şentürk, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Bulgar Meselesi (1850-1875)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1992), 76-77.

⁷⁸ İnalçık, *Tanzimat ve Bulgar*, 39.

⁷⁹ Şentürk, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde*, 77.

⁸⁰ İnalçık, *Tanzimat ve Bulgar*, 39.

⁸¹ Kocahanoğlu, Osman Selim (ed.), *Midhat Paşa'nın Hatıraları: Yıldız Mahkemesi ve Taif Zindanı [Mir'at-ı Hayret] Cilt. 2* (İstanbul: Temel Yayınları, 1997), 39.

⁸² Kamusella, Tomasz, Nomachi Motoki, and Catherine Gibson, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Slavic Languages, Identities and Borders* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 433.

⁸³ Şentürk, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde*, 220-221.

instructors taught in Russian and Bulgarian.⁸⁴ The great Bulgarian state was envisioned by Russia to expand its power on the lands of the Ottoman Empire and tried to be imposed on it by the Treaty of San Stefano of 1878. After objections from the Great Powers, the Treaty of Berlin divided “the Greater Bulgaria into Bulgaria proper, Eastern Rumelia and Macedonia”.⁸⁵ However, Russia did not abandon its policy to create ‘Greater Bulgaria’ which would annex Eastern Rumelia in the future. Therefore, it supervised the formation of the Principality of Bulgaria’s constitution and influenced the selection of its prince.⁸⁶

Conclusion

In the cases of Serbian, Greek, and Bulgarian uprisings, the deterioration of central authority at the local level coincided with the rise of the Orthodox Christian middle class in the second half of the eighteenth century. These revolts in their initial stages were manifestations of the *reaya* of their displeasure with living in a state of constant insecurity. Nationalist ideologies gained momentum in nationalist movements not at the very beginning of the revolts but rather towards the second half of the nineteenth century by the efforts of the national intelligentsia who were members of the new middle class in their respective societies. From then on, national-revolutionary organizations and secret committees were formed to promote nationalism.

A nationalist discourse was formulated in 1844 for Serbia after it gained autonomy from the Ottoman Empire in 1829. *Načertanije* spoke of an independent Serbian state based on ethnicity. There is a clear discrepancy between the text prepared by the rebels at Ostrujnitsa camp in 1804 and *Načertanije*. The shift between the texts indicates the efforts of the intelligentsia to construct a national identity and set a national goal. This political aim was to reach the borders of the Serbian Empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Similarly, the Greek *reaya* took part in the revolt that broke out in 1821 because of the Ottoman Empire’s inability to protect its *reaya* against the abuses of its officials, brigands, and Tepedenli Ali. *Megali Idea* was formed after the establishment of an independent Greek state. Like *Načertanije*, *Megali Idea* claimed that the present Greek state was very small, whereas the borders of the historical kingdom were far larger. A claim on the lands associated with Greek history and race was made.

Bulgarian *reaya* endured abuses of ayans, government officials, and brigands like Serbian and Greek *reaya*. The Russian Empire supported the uprisings, and as in the case of Bulgaria, it organized revolts against the Ottoman Empire. It also worked in the indoctrination of national intelligentsia.

As the victor of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), Russia partitioned the Ottoman Empire “in the exclusive interest of Russia” with the Treaty of San Stefano.⁸⁷ This was unacceptable for the British, the French, and the Austria-Hungary empires as it was shifting the balance of power towards Russia by creating vast Slavic states under its patronage and control. This concern was expressed by Austen Henry Layard, British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire:

“The object in view has been the aggrandizement of the Slav race, and the formation of a Slave State, which, endowed with Russian institutions, and placed under Russian supervision, is to be absolutely dependent upon Russia, if it does not speedily become virtually a Russian Province. The

⁸⁴ Aslı Yiğit Gülseven, “Rethinking Russian Pan-Slavism in the Ottoman Balkans: N.P. Ignatiev and the Slavic Benevolent Committee (1856-77)”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 53:3 (2017), 339.

⁸⁵ Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, “The Danubian Principalities and Bulgaria under Russian Protectorship”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge* 9:3 (1961), 354.

⁸⁶ Jelavich and Jelavich, “The Danubian Principalities,” 354.

⁸⁷ The National Archives, The Treaty of Berlin and the Convention of Constantinople (August 1878), ZLIB 15/16, 4.

Slav communities now under the dominion of Austria, together with Bosnia and Servia, will probably be absorbed ultimately into this vast Slav nationality, and the Russian Empire may then include the whole of Eastern Europe”.⁸⁸

Therefore, a new treaty was formed. The Treaty of Berlin was signed on 13 July 1878. With the Treaty of Berlin, Bulgaria became an autonomous tributary Principality under the Ottoman Sultan’s suzerainty with a Christian Government and a national militia (Article I); a province called “Eastern Rumania” was formed and constituted under the direct political and military authority of the Ottoman Sultan, with an administrative autonomy and a Christian Government (Article XIII), and Rumania (Article XLIII), Serbia (Article XXXIV), and Montenegro (Article XXVI) became independent.⁸⁹ The Ottoman Empire lost hold of the majority of its lands in the Balkans.



⁸⁸ The National Archives, Layard to the Earl of Derby, Remarks on the Treaty of San Stefano (23 March 1878), FO 881/3541.

⁸⁹ The National Archives, Memorandum on the Present State of the Questions Arising Under the Treaty of Berlin by Lord Tenterden (28 April 1880), FO 424/477.

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