

NORTH CAUCASUS IN THE CRIMEAN WAR

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Abstract

The Crimean War is one of the important turning points in Ottoman-Russian relations. While the Ottoman Empire tried to maintain its declining influence in the Black Sea with the support of its European allies, Russia tried to increase its influence in both the Balkans and the North Caucasus. Against this policy of Russia, the resistance groups in the North Caucasus tried to gain the support of the Ottoman Empire and its allies, while trying to create unity among themselves. The movements in the North Caucasus, which were far from forming any unity and providing organized resistance, ended after the war when Russia launched a total occupation and colonization activity in the Caucasus region. The war and resistance in the region gave way to one of the greatest tragedies in history, in which hundreds of thousands of Circassians were exiled and subjected to massacres. In this study, the situation in the North Caucasus during and after the Crimean War will be evaluated.

Keywords: Crimean War, Circassians, Russia, Ottoman Empire.

Öz

Kırım Savaşı Osmanlı-Rus ilişkilerindeki önemli dönüm noktalarından biridir. Osmanlı Karadeniz'de düşüşe geçen etkisini Avrupalı müttefiklerinin desteği ile birlikte korumaya çalışırken, Rusya ise hem Balkanlar'da hem de Kuzey Kafkasya'daki nüfuzunu arttırmaya çalışmıştır. Rusya'nın bu politikasına karşı Kuzey Kafkasya'daki direniş grupları bir yandan kendi içlerinde bir birlik oluşturmaya çalışırken, Osmanlı'nın ve onun müttefiklerinin desteğini kazanmaya çalışmışlardır. Herhangi bir birlik oluşturmak ve organize bir direniş sağlamaktan uzak olan Kuzey Kafkasya'daki hareketler savaş sonrasında Rusya'nın Kafkasya bölgesine topyekün bir işgal ve kolonizasyon faaliyeti başlatmasıyla son bulmuştur. Bölgedeki savaş ve direniş yerini yüzbinlerce Çerkesin sürgün edildiği ve katliamlara maruz kaldığı tarihin en büyük trajedilerinden birine bırakmıştır. Bu çalışmada Kırım Savaşı ve sonrasında Kuzey Kafkasya'da ortaya çıkan durum değerlendirilecektir.

Anahtar Kelime: Kırım Savaşı, Çerkesler, Rusya, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu.

INTRODUCTION

During the 19th century, many wars occurred within the Ottoman territories, at its border with the Balkans and in the Caucasus, impacting people living in conflict zones. During the Crimean War (1853-1856), the Ottomans did not lose any territory, but the results generated controversy due to their enduring social and political influences for the Ottoman Empire. After the Crimean War, Russia invaded the Caucasus inflicting immense cruelty on the Circassians,¹ forcing them into exile. As a result of this mass expulsion, a significant number of people were dispersed across the Ottoman territories, the Middle East, the Balkans and Anatolia. This paper will firstly discuss how the outcomes of the Crimean War affected Russia's policy toward the North Caucasus. Secondly, an analysis will be presented examining the attitudes of various groups toward the Circassians during the Crimean war, as well as toward each other and Russia as aggressor. Lastly, the Ottoman and the British responses to the Circassian exile from the North Caucasus will be analyzed.

1. Historical Background of Russian-Caucasian and Ottoman Relations

By the end of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire dominated the Black Sea Region. However, concurrently, following the collapse of the Golden Horde, Russia directed its attention toward the eastern region of the Black Sea (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 58). Before the conquest of the Caucasus by the Russians, the Caucasus tribes lived independently, their population composed of the Circassians, Abkhazians, the Chechens, Ingushes and the Daghestanis. They were independent of the Persians and the Ottomans and other states, but did accept the "Over lordship of Ottomans or Persians" (Figes, 2011, p, 17,18). At this time Russia was already unsettled by both the Ottoman presence and the presence of Muslims at its southern border in the North Caucasus region and the Black Sea. As the situation was not under its control it was therefore perceived to be a threat to its own existence. Thus, Russia began to implement a strategy toward the south that involved removing the Muslim population from the region increasing the settlement of Christian settlers. Historians, such as Orlando Figes, have since characterized this policy as a 'Crusade' against the Muslim population, with Russia's aim being to Christianize the Caucasus. Specifically, in 1816, when General Alexander Ermolov took office in the Caucasus, "the Russians fought a savage war of terror, raiding villages,

¹ The Circassians are the one of the Caucasian nations. It consisted on 12 different tribes. They used "Adige" to identify themselves and speak Adige language.

burning houses, destroying crops and clearing the forests, in a vain attempt to subjugate the mountain tribes” (Figes, 2011, p. 17, 18).

The Russians and the North Caucasians had had a relationship since the beginning of the sixteenth century, and by the eighteenth century, Russia had still not determined whether or not to occupy or colonize the North Caucasus region (Kreiten, 2009, p. 216). Later, when the Russians later decided to occupy the region, they employed a twofold invasion policy (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 58). Firstly, they aimed to capture the Kabarda region, and secondly, the North Caucasus (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 61). Subsequently, Russia followed the European model for overseas colonization, identifying and legitimizing itself as an Imperial Christian state (Kreiten, 2009, p. 215). However, Russia faced resistance in the Caucasus, with the first organized confrontation led by Sheikh Mansur (d. 1794) of the Nakshabandi order. Mansur was the first leader to call for a United North Caucasus, but he was captured by the Russians in 1791 (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 61).

Moreover, it was apparent that Russia was motivated by the need to improve its political and economic power, because its counterparts, especially European countries, had powerful armies that represented a threat (Kreiten, 2009, p. 215). To achieve this, Russia sought to create colonies to increase its political and economic capacity (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 63). Prior to the Treaty of the Adrianople in 1828, which was signed between the Ottomans and the Russians, the Russians had not reached the south side of the river Kuban (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 63, 64). In the Adrianople Treaty, the Ottomans accepted that Russia had a political right to the Caucasus. Following the treaty’s ratification, the Russians employed various tactics against the Western Circassians. While on the one hand, Russia endeavored to collaborate with the Northern Caucasus tribes, on the other, its troops used excessive force against the Caucasians to defeat any resistance (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 63, 64).

Originally, Russia sought to control the Western Caucasus and establish a dominant position, particularly on the Black Sea coast. To achieve this goal, they limited the influence of Iran and the Ottoman Empire in the North Caucasus region through the Turkmenchay (1827) and Edirne (1829) treaties, respectively. Additionally, curbing the influence of Great Britain, a rising rival in the region, became crucial. However, as with the other two empires, this proved challenging. Despite initial efforts in the 1830s, Britain's interest waned by the 1860s, tacitly acknowledging Russia's regional dominance (Aydın, 2011).

It could be reasoned that even before the Crimean War, Russia had planned the deportation of the Muslim population from the Caucasus, intending to settle an alternative Slav and Christian population in the region. The Russians had already begun settling the Armenian population

from Anatolia in the Transcaucasia region (McCarthy, 1997, p. 79, 80). Also at this time, Russia was improving its relationship with Orthodox Georgia. Thus, the Georgians and Armenians were acting in concert with Russia to occupy and Christianize the Caucasus (Figes, 2011, p. 18). It is apparent this policy was profitable for both Russia and Georgia. Russia was able to achieve its aim of increasing the Christian Population of the Caucasus; and Georgia was able to create a buffer against the Ottomans and Persians occupying its territory (Figes, 2011, p. 30). Russia had already surrounded the Caucasus by occupying the Transcaucasia region and improving its relations with Georgia.

The relationship the Ottoman Empire established with the North Caucasus before the war was relatively complex. Although the Ottoman Empire wanted to maintain its relationships with the people of the region due to their shared religion and the geopolitical importance of the Caucasus, it did not want to anger the Russians as it feared becoming a target itself. With the Edirne Treaty of 1829, the Ottoman Administration relinquished all rights over the Caucasus recognizing Russia's influence over the region. Consequently, the Ottomans did not want to oppose Russia by responding positively to Imam Shamil's calls to support a jihad through the caliphate after 1839 (Badem, 2017, p. 126).²

The Ottoman Empire's relationship with Shamil began to change in 1853 as its relations with Russia started to deteriorate. Shamil saw the worsening of Russia-Ottoman relations as an opportunity, urging more aggressive resistance to stop the Russian advance in the North Caucasus, even preventing the occupation of the region. At the end of the summer of 1853, before the Ottomans officially declared war against Russia, Shamil took action against the Russians in the Tiflis region with a force of approximately 10 thousand people, although he had to retreat without receiving any support from the Ottoman administration (Badem, 2017, p. 139-141). On October 4, 1853, the Ottomans declared war on Russia, issuing an edict demanding Shamil join the attack against the Russians. Although the Ottoman administration provided some support in terms of military materials (such as gunpowder) on occasion, major aid was not forthcoming until May 1854. Muhammed Emin, Sheikh Shamil's regent, stated that if the Ottoman Empire were to provide sufficient military equipment and military support, the situation in the North Caucasus would change, the people there would largely turn in their favour, and the Russians would be forced to leave the region (Badem, 2017, p. 185)

² *Sheikh or Imam Shamil* (d.1871) who was one of the most important political and religious leaders in the Caucasus during the 19th century. He organized religious resistance (*jihad*) against the Russian occupation in the Caucasus.

2. Crimean War

Before the Crimean War, Britain had already tried to establish a line of resistance through Afghanistan and Iran to thwart Russia's strategy of advancing south. It had invaded Afghanistan (1838), improved its diplomatic relations with Iran, and proposed the idea of capturing Baghdad from the Ottomans to make it part of a front line (Figes, 2011, p. 51). Thus, the Caucasus region had been largely ignored in Britain's policy of blocking Russia's southern expansion strategy. However, the development of the Egyptian problem; i.e., the Ottoman administrations difficulties with the Egyptian Governor Mehmet Ali Pasha of Kavala and his military operation toward Istanbul, prompted Britain to change its line of resistance against the Russians, strengthening and extending it even further. As the Ottoman Empire could not obtain assistance from any European state, it requested that the Russians help stop Mehmet Ali Pasha, subsequently prompting Britain to take action. Britain took the necessary steps to ensure trust from the Ottomans, and the *Balta Limanı* Trade Agreement was signed between the two empires. In return for gaining considerable commercial privileges in the agreement, Britain guaranteed the security of the Ottoman Empire against Russia. Commitment to this policy endured until the Reval meetings in 1908. During this period, the Ottoman administration had a guarantee against Russia to protect its territorial integrity. However, this agreement did not prevent Britain and Russia from expanding their influence and territory at the expense of the Ottoman Empire.

The main reason for the Crimean War was that both France and Russia needed to gain the support of their own people. The rulers of both countries had recently come to power, and both wished to increase their political authority inside their own countries (Zurcher, 2009, p. 53). Both generated propagandas, citing the desire to bring the Holy Places of Palestine under the control of their own religious orders, as the reason for the war. At that time, the Russians represented the Orthodox Church, and France the Catholic Church. On 5 May 1853, Russia asked Ottoman Porte to grant it control over the entire Christian Orthodox population in the Ottoman Empire, which was more than a third of the Empire's entire population, and clearly represented intent to gain more than simply control over the Orthodox Church (Zurcher, 2009, p. 53). The Ottoman Porte, which had the political support of both Britain and France, rejected Russia's demands. Hereupon, Russia declared war and attacked on the Balkans, and troops were sent toward Wallachia and Moldova. Despite the fact that the Ottomans, British and French did not want to join the war, they felt they had no other option than to declare war on Russia. When Austria joined the war on the side of the Allies, consisting of the Ottomans, British and French,

Russia sent the majority of its troops to the Balkans. Meanwhile, the British and French troops took Sevastopol from the Russians (Zurcher, 2009, p. 53, 54).

Before war broke out, it seemed that the Balkans would be the battle ground, because the Russians had surrounded Silistre (present day northeastern Bulgaria), which had been defended by the Ottoman troops. At the same time, the British and French had attacked the Russians from the Baltic region (Henze, 1990, p. 39). However, organizing the groups of the North Caucasus seemed to be a less important task to Britain and France. Their priority was the destruction of the Russian Black Sea fleet and the naval base in Sevastopol. Although Britain and France sent diplomats and agents to the Caucasus region, and benefited from the observations of travelers to the area it was never afforded a priority position, despite the ongoing influence of the Ottomans in the region being an undesirable situation for the Allies (Britain and France) (Badem, 2017, p. 184, 190).

When the war started, the Russians left about 23,000 troops in the Caucasus, since they did not expect the area to be a battle ground. Concurrently the Turks marched toward the Caucasus with a relatively greater number of troops than the Russians (Henze, 1990, p. 39, 40). The Ottomans were planning to use their naval power to support the land troops and make a glorious landing on the coasts of Circassia. However, the Allies did not approve of the Ottoman Navy approaching the coast of Circassia,³ and stated they deemed it appropriate for the navy to wait in Varna. The aim being to prevent the Ottoman Empire from increasing its influence along the coasts of Circassia among the Circassians (Badem, 2017, p. 190, 191).

The Ottomans were planning to gather some of their land troops in Erzurum and attack the Russian troops from there via Batumi and *Çürüksu*, a town along the Georgian Black Sea coast. Thus, they started to recruit soldiers from the provinces of Diyarbekir, Harput, Van and Lazistan (ATASE, KH., 3-8-5-30, KH., 3-8-5-31). When the Ottoman troops reached Circassia without a naval force, their influence over the local population was very limited (Badem, 2017, p. 1901). This was because the Ottoman army and soldiers faced some difficulties in the war. Lack of sufficient equipment placed the army in a challenging situation. The Ottoman troops were unable to make a spectacular departure from sea to land, and the lack of materials at their disposal also made this difficult. Soldiers who had no rain-resistant clothing used parts of old tent to protect themselves from the rain (ATASE, KH., 3-8-12. Fî 9 N. Sene [12]69. 18-6-1853).

³ Today, Circassia is Krasnodar Krai, the Republic of Adygeya and Karachay-Cherkessia of the Russian Federation. In the Ottoman documents Circassia have been named as 'Çerkezistan'.

Batumi and Çürüksu ports were strategically important to the Ottoman Empire. If Ottoman troops were to hold the coastal line from Trabzon to Batumi, Çürüksu, Sukhumi and Anapa, they would then restrict Russia's opening to the Black Sea. This would also prevent Russian troops from retaining a grip on the coastline and establishing relations with their fortresses and military bases in the northern regions of the Central Caucasus (ATASE, KH., 5-13-15. Fî 9 S. Sene [12]70. 05-06-1854. KH., 5-13-15-1, Fî 26 Muharrem sene [12]70. 29-10-1853). Therefore, the activities of the Russian navy off the Caucasus were closely monitored and attempts made to prevent the Russians from being active on the coasts (ATASE, KH., 5-13-15-3, Fî 26 Muharrem sene [12]70. 29-10-1853). The Ottomans were also trying to extend military support to the Circassians, to prevent the Russians from gaining their support (BOA, HR_SYS__01349_00060_002_001, 24-07-1854). Although their efforts were limited, the Ottomans were also simultaneously aiming to mobilize Sheikh Shamil, his regent Muhammed Emin and Zanuko Sefer Bey (ATASE, KH., 110-9-1-1 / 5 - 13 - 56).

In August 1853, Shamil, attacked Georgia, which was already experiencing chaos, gaining significant territory from the Russians. This attack emboldened the Ottomans and also galvanized the Europeans against the Russians. The Ottomans rushed Redutkale, which was then placed under Russian garrison, capturing it. As a result of this attack, Russia's connection between Poti and Crimea was severed. Russia then began preparations for its own attack against the North Caucasians. In 1854, the Russians attacked the Ottoman troops, losing some grounds in the Caucasus. This successful attack by the Russians brought about an attack on the Crimea, intended by the British and French to damage Russian naval power (Henze, 1990, p. 40-42).

There is ongoing discussion concerning the important role played by the Circassians during the Crimean War, specifically regarding whether the British and the Ottomans waited for the Circassians' support. Before the British and French troops attacked the Russians, a group of delegates, from the Caucasus went to Varna to negotiate with the British and French commanders. The delegates were sent by Shamil who controlled Chechnya and Dagestan at the time. However, the British and French were interested in Circassia, Northwest Caucasus, and not Chechnya and Dagestan. Nevertheless, the British and French commanders had doubts about the Circassians' military capacity. According to Henze, they thought the Circassians' forces were not adequate to sustain a war against the Russians (Henze, 1990, p. 42, 43).

In the days following the end of the war diplomatic meetings and decision-making processes raised significant concerns. The Ottoman administration was considering the possibility of establishing an independent state in the North Caucasus in the aftermath of the Crimean War. In order to actively participate in this process, and to evaluate the reactions of the people in the

Caucasus, Dagestani Enis Pasha from the *Tercüme Odası*⁴ was sent to the region (BOA. A. AMD., 68-63-1, H-29-12-1272. 31-09-1856). The positive opinions of Britain and France in relation to establishing a separate state in the region led the Ottoman Empire to adopt a similar position, supporting the liberation of the region from Russian pressure. The Ottomans preferred the region be under a government that would implement Islamic rules, even if it was not affiliated with the Ottoman State (BOA. A. AMD., 68-63-1, H-29-12-1272. 31-09-1856). When the Circassians learned that a ceasefire agreement would be signed after the end of the Crimean War and a peace agreement made between the warring states, they applied to the Ottoman administration requesting to participate in the negotiations. The request was made by Sefer Pasha and included a petition for travel expenses to be covered by the Ottoman administration (BOA. HR. SYS.,1355-62-1, Fî 9 Ş. Sene [1]272. 15-04-1856).

In the following months, negotiations began in Paris between the British, French, Ottomans and the Russians. According to the Paris treaty, 30 March 1856, the Ottomans and Russia readmitted the Adrianople Treaty. A significant result of this act was that the Black Sea was then disarmed (Henze, 1990, p. 47). However, throughout the Paris meetings and negotiations, the Circassians were not mentioned by the Allies and Russia. Arguably, the Circassians' relationship with the Allies during the Crimean War informed this result, because they did not act with the Allies and there were insufficient connections amongst them to sustain resistance against the Russians. It is possible that this led to the Allies' inappropriate approaches to the Circassian issue. For its part, Russia was encouraged by this perceived lack of interest in the Paris Peace Conference and the fact that the Circassians were not mentioned. The Russians saw the Circassians as invaders occupying Russian territory on their own land and implemented a policy of purifying the Circassian population from the region (Richmond, 2013, p. 85, 86). This policy comprised various stages of displacement, dispossession, forced migration and the mass murder of civilians.

In the days following the Paris Agreement, a group from among the Circassians (it was not known whether they represented the Circassian community) appealed to the Ottoman Empire demanding that they not be handed over to Russia. The Circassians objected to the fact that they were already being brought a *fait accompli* with their lands being given to Russia with the Treaty of Edirne, saying they were Muslims and did not want to live under Russia's control

⁴ *Tercüme Odası* or Translation Office was a sub unit of Sublime Porte (Bab-ı Ali). The official state papers have been translated there. The Office became a significant palce for the Ottoman Bureaucracy during the Tanzimat Period.

(BOA. HR. SYS., 81-25-1, Fî 27 L. Sene [12]73. 20-06-1857). However, their efforts proved futile and Russian troops launched an all-out siege and attack.

3. Resistance of Shamil and the Invasion of the North Caucasus by Russia

The Caucasus population, especially the Kabarday tribes, had already suffered as a result of the Russian - Caucasus War. The Kabarday tribes suffered huge losses up to 1818, as their population fell from 350,000 to about 50,000 (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 63). However, over the following several decades Imam Shamil implemented cohesion among the various tribes and people of the Caucasus. Shamil's resistance was successful against the Russian troops in Eastern Caucasia. He set up resistance lines against the Russians which led to the free the Eastern Caucasus (McCarthy, 1995, p. 33). Islam played cohesive role in Shamil's policies when implementing the line of resistance. The main pillars of Shamil's policies were the Caucasus national struggle and its pursuit of independence based on Islamic principles. However, some Circassian Beys did not join Shamil in his resistance against the Russians because of his "egalitarian doctrine" (Karpat, 2002, p. 652). They formed their own army, comprised of soldiers collected in 1837 from among the different Circassian tribes. Arguably, the differences between the Circassian tribes and Shamil's forces generated a feeling of hopelessness among them, because they were unable to set up unified lines of resistance. In contrast, during the Crimean War, Shamil's forces caused significant setbacks for Russian troops, although the Russians managed to recognize that the Circassians and Shamil's forces were not cooperating with one another (Karpat, 2002, p. 652). After the war, the Russians decided to undertake a final attack, attempting to destroy the Eastern Caucasus resistance. They overcame the Chechen and Daghestanis tribes and Shamil was captured by the Russians in 25 August 1859 (McCarthy, 1995, p. 34). After Shamil was taken prisoner by the Russians, the Circassian Beys were unable to continue their fight against the Russians who were very strong. Thus, the Circassians resistance was ultimately decimated by the Russians (Karpat, 2002, p. 652).

One of the reasons for the limited participation of Circassians in the Crimean War was that the Circassians saw the Ottomans did not (or could not be able to) support them intensively. The relevance of this for the Circassians was that if the Circassians attacked Russian troops en masse and did not receive any support from either the Allies or the Ottomans, then the Russians would be able to punish the Circassians very harshly in the later stages or after the war. Although the Ottomans wanted to support the North Caucasians and gain ground against the Russians in the Caucasus, their military and economic conditions combined with their administrative

weaknesses prevented them from doing so. The Ottoman administration was able to provide limited support to the North Caucasians, allowing the Circassians to fight against Russian troops, albeit in a limited and hesitant manner. For the Allies and the Ottomans, different factors explain why the Circassians did not receive great support from the Allies against the Russian troops. That it the Allies were planning to destroy the Russian naval power in the Black Sea. While doing so, they did not support the Ottoman Empire, gaining a position in the Black Sea increasing its influence over the coasts of Circassia and among the Circassians. Another significant consideration was that the Circassians could not afford the Allies sufficient confidence to form a union and fight against the Russians. The lack of a united structure and leadership within Circassian society was one of the most important reasons of this.

After the war, although Russia was defeated, it was able to strengthen its influence in the Caucasus region (Badem, 2017, p. 391). For the Allies, particularly the French, the Caucasus region was not considered a very important issue (Richmond, 2013, p. 63).⁵ The Ottoman administration did not introduce the issue of Circassia to the agenda at the Paris Peace Conference, and despite Britain's demand to institute an arrangement in the region, Ali Pasha, who was present at the conference representing the Ottomans, stated "those places are not that important for us, we will be content with liberating a disputed area around Çürüksu" (Badem, 2017, p. 342). Consequently, the Russian administration first captured Shamil and broke down resistance in the eastern Caucasus within a few years. Russia then turned its attention to the northwest Caucasus and ended the resistance there in what became a humanitarian catastrophe, as genocidal violence led to the expulsion of 90% of the population from the region. The Allies' lack of interest in the North Caucasus region, the Ottoman administration's weakness, both militarily and financially, and its shortsightedness, as demonstrated at the Paris Peace Conference, not only strengthened Russia's presence in the Caucasus, but also facilitated the occupation and colonization of the region in the long run, and eventually its complete absorption into the Russian Empire.

3.1. What was the reason for the exodus?

A key explanation for the exodus was that Russia had needed to solidify its "national pride" after being overcome by the Allies in the Crimean War. This meant, the "Subjugation of the Circassians" was an inevitable objective for Russia (Kreiten, 2009, p. 216). After the war Russia stationed almost all its existing soldiers in the Caucasus (Henze, 1990, p. 50). It seemed that

⁵ French did not have any interest in the North Caucasus. However, Britain was more interested in the region than France.

the Ottomans and Shamil's attacks on the Caucasus during the Crimean War had scared the Russians to action. It is possible the Crimean defeat and Shamil's attacks led to an alteration in Russia's strategic planning regarding the Caucasus. After the war, Russia used excessive force against the Caucasians to seize control over them. It is difficult to characterize this new policy as anything other than systematic terror and massacre (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 68). Russian troops accorded greater importance to attacking the Western Caucasus because the Eastern Caucasus was more isolated and located away from the area of intervention of the great powers, while the Western Caucasus was both an area in which the great powers may be interested and a place that Russia may want to capture due to its geopolitical importance (Keçeci, 2016, p. 70, 71). Russian Military officers debated with each other on how to overcome the Circassians, determining whether it would be preferable to settle the Circassians on the occupied Caucasus or to drive them from their homeland (Kreiten, 2009, p. 216).

In November 1863, the Commander in Chief of the Russians Caucasian army took a decision to "clean" the coasts of Circassians and expel them from the region (Kreiten, 2009, p. 220). On 14 April 1864, Prince Mikhail offered two options to the Circassians; either to be settled on the plains, as directed by the Russians, or to abandon their homeland. Within a month, they were to be forced to leave the region to relocate in Ottoman territory (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 68). Russia's options for the Circassians were unacceptable to them since they had been living in the area for centuries. They had also been fighting against the Russians for years with some success. Russia forced the Circassians to accept its decision by destroying their houses and their living area. However, the Circassians continued to resist Russia (McCarthy, 1995, p. 34), refusing to accept that they should leave their homeland. The result was that the Circassians were massacred en masse (Kreiten, 2009, p. 217).

It has been argued that before the Crimean War Russia had plans to colonize the Caucasus to increase its economic and geopolitical power in the region. The outcomes of the Crimean War gave it the opportunity to realize this aim in the Caucasus, particularly in Circassia, by invading Caucasia and exiling the Circassians. After the Circassian exodus, the area was reportedly totally destroyed such that it was possible to walk an entire day without coming across anyone (McCarthy, 1995, p. 34).

3.2 How the exile was carried out by the russians, and the ottoman and europeans' role

The Circassians faced many difficulties during their exile. They were forcibly relocated by Russia to the coasts. Russian forces did not supply them with anything to meet their most basic needs as they waited for the ships sent by the Ottomans to take them to the Ottoman territory.

Many of the ships were not appropriate for a distant exile (McCarthy, 1997, p. 336). Hundreds of thousands of Circassians and Abkhazians were forced to leave their homeland from Taman, Anapa, Novorossik, Tuapsa, Sochi, Adler and Sukhumi ports to the Ottoman ports, Trabzon, Samsun and Sinop (Jaimoukha, 2001, p. 68). They suffered from starvation and disease during this journey.

Before the Circassians were rounded up to be sent to Ottoman territory, the Russian colonial authorities informed the Ottoman officials of their intention. However, they did not declare the number of the refugees (Kreiten, 2009, p. 221). The Ottomans established the Refugee Commission in 1860, and Russian general Mikhail Loris-Melikov went to Istanbul to discuss the number of immigrants that would be sent from Russia. An agreement was reached to accept between 40 and 50 thousand immigrants (Hamed-Troyansky, 2018, p. 54). However, subsequently, hundreds of thousands of Circassians were forced to leave for the Ottoman Empire. The Porte was not adequately prepared to welcome this number of refugees and could not always meet their simplest needs (McCarthy, 1997, p. 336). After disembarking at the Ottoman ports, epidemic diseases spread expeditiously among the Circassian refugees, and high rates of mortality among them were reported. For example, in Trabzon, in 1863, every 24 hours twenty to thirty refugees died (McCarthy, 2002, p. 106).

There is a debate concerning the role of the Ottoman government in the exodus. Certainly, the Ottomans needed a larger productive population, as after the 1750s there had been a decrease in the Muslim and Turk populations resulting variously from natural disasters, disease and wars with the Russians (1768 – 1829). A large population was a necessity if the Ottomans were to consolidate the Empire's economy and army. The Ottoman government realizing this established a migration policy in March 1857, according to which the "Ottoman State was open to anyone who was willing to give his allegiance to the Sultan, settlers would have religious freedom, the government promised to give the settlers without any charge the best arable treasury lands" (Karpat, 1985, p. 60-62). This declaration was translated and sent to many European countries, resulting in a large number of positive responses. Thus, in line with the declaration it was argued the Empire's Muslim population, including men of fighting age, would be positively increased with Circassian refugees (Karpat, 2002, p. 653). Despite the Ottomans having set up the aforementioned General Administrative Commission of Migration in 1860, under Hafız Paşa, the governor of Trabzon, they did not anticipate the arrival of such a huge number of refugees (Karpat, 2002, p. 653). Had they been expecting them, they would have had basic foods and accommodation available to host the Circassian refugees.

Arguably, even though the Ottomans had close cultural, social and political relation with Caucasus, they ignored the Circassians. A further significant reason may have been that Ottoman society and public opinion did not have any notable influence on the Empire's foreign policy. Possibly a further factor was lack of knowledge; the Ottoman people did not know about what was happening in the Caucasus at that time because they did not have a developed press. However, the British did have a well-developed press, and their journalists had been very interested the Crimean war. The British followed the war from reports in the press, leading to its designation as the "First Modern War (Henze, 1990, p. 43-46).

Another event that revealed the Ottoman's helplessness in this case was Sadr-ı Azam Ali Paşa and the British Istanbul ambassador Bulwer's meetings. During these meetings, Bab-ı Ali requested assistance from the British Government to resolve the refugee crises, including help with transportation and living costs. Moreover, Bab-ı Ali demanded debt from the British government to meet the basic needs of the refugees because the Ottoman Treasury was facing many difficulties in helping the refugees at those times. Bab-ı Ali asked for some passenger ships from the British Government to transfer the refugees from the Caucasus to the Ottoman ports (Çiçek, 2009, p. 72). However, the British rejected their demands, because they were not interested in the Circassian refugee issue. They suggested that if the Ottoman government agreed, the British government would be able to supply ships to the Ottoman Government on a rental basis (Çiçek, 2009, p. 72). The Ottomans had not received significant help from anywhere and could not manage the situation. Only after the refugees arrived at the Ottoman ports of Samsun and Trabzon, and scarcity and epidemic disease took hold, was the scale of the challenge understood.

It is important to explore here why the Europeans not interested in what was happening. Firstly, as mentioned above, during the Crimean War the press had had a huge impact, particularly on British public opinion. After the success at Sevastopol, which was bombed by the British and French troops, the British public were no longer interested in sending troops to the Caucasus for a new war. Possibly, another significant reason for the disinterest on the part of the British and French governments was the uncoordinated nature of the Circassian resistance. As apparent from the Circassian-Russian battles, the Circassian tribes were not sufficiently effectively coordinated in how they managed their combat against the Russians. During the Crimean War, not even the Ottoman Empire had been able to guarantee assistance from them against the Russians. At one point during the Crimean War, the Ottomans had marched toward Zugdidi, Georgia without British and French support, and waited for assistance from the Circassians and

Abkhazians; however, they had proved unable to organize military support to assist them (Henze, 1990, p. 4-47).

A further factor may have been that the Europeans were not geographically close enough to the Circassians and the other Caucasus tribes to be considered as important to the British government as the Ottoman Empire. Britain's focus was on preventing Russia from expanding into its sphere of influence in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, some members of the British diplomatic service, the intelligentsia and journalists became interested in the Circassians offering to support them against the Russians. Overall, however, the general stance of the British toward the Circassians was ambivalent (Çiçek, 2009, p. 63).

The number of Circassians exiled is another matter of controversy as different figures are claimed by historians. Before Prince Mikhail's declaration, 14 April 1864, a number of Circassians had already left Circassia for the Ottoman Empire. According to Karpat, from 1858 to summer 1863 around 80,000 Circassians relocated to Ottoman territory. However, in the spring of 1864, 400,000 Circassians were dispatched from the Russian ports (Karpat, 1985, p. 67). According to some Russian sources, the Russian press mentioned that 493,194 people had left; however, this figure only includes those deported from ports, ignoring those who entered Ottoman territory via land routes.⁶ Karpat (p.68), also argues that, by 1866, 1,000,000 people had left their homeland with only 700,000 arriving at their destination alive. Another historian Abdullah Saydam gives similar figures based on the *Takvim-i Vekayi* newspaper, stating that by 1866, 700,000 out of a million people had reached the Ottoman ports and cities, meaning one third of the exiled population had died in transit (Saydam, 1997, p. 91) Overall, Karpat claims that from 1862-1870 somewhere between 1,200,000 and 2,000,000 Circassians migrated from the Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire, with approximately 500,000 Circassians dying during this exodus, excluding those who died travelling via the land route. Around 1,000,000 Circassians reached the Samsun, Trabzon, Varna, Kostence ports (Karpat, 2002, p. 653-654). McCarthy claims that if including later immigration movement (after the 1877-1878 Russian Ottoman War) 1,200,000 Circassians and Abkhazians left their lands, with just 800,000 surviving. The 400,000 who died either succumbed to disease and starvation or were killed by the Russians (McCarthy, 1997, p. 337).

⁶ FM (Id) 175, 23 September and 3 October 1864; the report is translated from the Russian press.

CONCLUSION

This paper has primarily discussed Russian and the Ottoman policies in the Caucasus with regard to the Crimean war, with particular emphasis on the Circassians. After Russia had become a powerful country, many wars between them and the Ottoman Empire ensued, both in the Balkans and the Caucasus. These wars led to social and political disasters for the inhabitants of these regions. The Crimean War proved to be one of the most significant in terms of its results. By the time of the Crimean War, the Circassians had failed to establish a policy of cohesive resistance against the Russians. However, Shamil was able to carry out a unified organization in the Eastern Caucasus, despite many northeastern Circassian tribes not joining his forces because of how he organized his resistance. Meanwhile, the Ottomans' weakened position and European indifference regarding the Circassians, who were culturally and geographically far away from Europe, made the prospect of invading the Caucasus more attractive to Russia, leading to the forced exile of the Circassians to Ottoman territory. The Caucasian tribes were defeated and exiled by the Russians, with 1,200,000 Circassians forced to leave their lands. During this exodus, Russia used excessive military force, genocidal violence and carried out massacres to drive the Circassians from their homeland. In addition, the tragedy was compounded because the Ottomans were not prepared to welcome the huge numbers of refugees. The result was death, disaster, disease and starvation among the refugees, whether they travelled from ports or by land. Ultimately, historians broadly agree that one third of the population died during this exodus.

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