



## Tanzimat Reforms and the Ottoman Empire's Reaction to Western Powers, 1839-1876

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### ABSTRACT

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The Ottoman Empire entered the 19th century under pressure to preserve its existence against Western powers. Dismissing the illusions of past superiority, the Ottoman court acknowledged that reforms had to be instituted to end the Empire's long-time stagnation and instability. The Tanzimat reform movement was the most significant reaction of the Ottoman Empire to the Western powers during the period between 1839 and 1876. During the Tanzimat period, all aspects of the empire were reshaped in a new way with certain success. Through Tanzimat, the Ottoman Empire continued to preserve its position as one of the major powers of the European political order, re-established its autonomy in domestic affairs, and successfully defended its sovereignty in many disputed regions with considerable might against a powerful emerging West.

### KEYWORDS:

Ottoman Empire, Islam, Tanzimat, Reformation, West Asia

### 1. Crisis and Reforms of Ottoman Empire in the 18th and early 19th centuries

For the entire existence of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1923), the period from the 18th to the early 19th centuries is now considered a time of profound changes. Previously, the mainstream consensus was that the 18th - early 19th century was a period of severe crisis for the Ottoman Empire, situated after the golden age of the long 16th century and right before the reform period from the middle of the 19th century. However, recent scholarship has shed a new light to this historical period, recognizing the period as a pivotal turning point for the transformation of the Ottoman Empire from the classical model of the 15th-17th centuries to the modern model of the 19th century, which is often referred to as the *Second Ottoman Empire*.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning from the middle of the 18th century, especially after the defeat against the Russian Empire in the war of 1768-1774, Ottoman's military setbacks and financial troubles, concealed from the international community during the peaceful first half of the 18th century, came to the forefront. The Tulip Era (*Lâle Devri*, 1718-1730), although

regarded as a period of relative peace and prosperity after decades of misfortunes in the late 17th century, the economic stagnation was not effectively resolved. The glory and glamor of the royal court efficaciously masked these underlying issues, thus the era is seen as an era of indulgence instead of the inherent dynamism of the Empire. (Dale, 2009: 177) The Porte faced a succession of external wars and internal suppressions, as it sought to quell the aspirations for independence among ambitious local elites and burgeoning revolutionary movements within its provinces. Some reform efforts have been spurred on to salvage the situation, though the results were not satisfactory. Defeats under the Russians marked the Ottoman Empire a favorite target in the struggle for dominance between Russian, Austrian, British, and French powers (Neumann, 2006). Facing territorial losses and political instability, reformist Padishahs such as Selim III (1789-1807) and Mahmud II (1808-1839) had to carry out many short-term reforms in an effort to respond to the emergence of a Western-led world order.

Shortly after ascending the throne, Padishah Selim III initiated a series of Western-style reforms commonly known

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<sup>1</sup> From the defeat at Vienna in 1683, this period lasted until 1826, i.e. until Padishah Mahmud II (1808-1839) purged the janissary and carried out extensive reforms. Some scholars figured the year 1703 as the starting point of the period, when military and clerical forces launched the Edrine coup that toppled Padishah Mustafa II, and the end of the period is 1839, when Mustafa Reshid Pasha proclaimed the Tanzimat decree on behalf of Padishah Abdulmejid, which began the reform period of the Ottoman Empire.

as the *Nizam-i Cedit* (New Order). These reforms primarily focused on the military, leading to the establishment of a new army trained by Western officers. To finance the reforms, Selim III established a new treasury (*İrad-i Cedit*), funded via the taxation of goods previously subject to little to no tax, the confiscation of the estates of deceased ministers and landlords, as well as the devaluation of the currency. (Shaw, 1976: 262) Selim III's effort severely undermined two fundamental pillars of the Ottoman political system: (1) the *janissaries* were marginalized within the military structure and facing financial hardships due to the currency devaluation, and (2) the *ayan* (local landlord) were frequent confiscated of properties and subjected to heavy taxes. These political actors played key roles in the events of 1806-08. The janissary staged a *coup d'état* that deposed Selim III in 1807. In response, a counter-coup led by a number of *ayans* loyal to Selim III briefly restored the Padishah to the throne in 1808. However, before the former emperor Selim III could be rescued, he was murdered. Consequently, Alemdar Mustafa Pasha (1755-1808), the loyalist leader, placed another pro-reform prince, Mahmud II, on the throne (Zürcher, 1993: 27-29)

In October 1808, local ministers and landlords simultaneously signed *Sened-i İttifak*, a decree formalizing the mutual obligations and rights between the court and the *ayans*. The *ayans* swore allegiance to the Padishah and supported his reforms, ensuring financial and military obligations to the court. In return, the court pledged to protect their life and property, as well as to respect their inherent privileges. (Akyıldız, 1998) However, this decree was never fully implemented. Two months later, the janissaries rebelled again, killing resulting in the death of Alemdar Mustafa Pasha and forcing Mahmud II to concede to many of their demands. (Yaycıoğlu, 2010)

Mahmud II's regime soon faced significant challenges from the Serbian and Greek independence movements, along with the rebellious Egypt. While the Treaty of Edirne (1829) recognized Serbian and Greek independence, the governor Muhammad Ali Pasha nearly overthrew the Osmanli dynasty before yielding to the foreign pressures in exchange for the hereditary right of Egypt. (Zürcher, 1993: 30-34) The Napoleonic Wars (1809-1812) in Europe provided the Ottoman court ample opportunity to address domestic issues. By 1830, through a combination of peaceful and violent measures, the central court had reasserted control over most of Anatolia and Rumeli provinces. (Shaw, 1976: 14-16) In the same year, after centuries of unsuccessful attempts to control the janissary forces, Padishah Mahmud II had completely purged the janissaries and instituted a new legion trained in the Western model.

Behind this tumultuous period was a prolonged economic crisis that lasted through the 18th - early 19th century. The budget remained in deficit for over a century, with the treasury's revenues stagnating until the 1840s, mainly due to excessive financial intermediaries leeching off the system.

(Pamuk et al., 2010: 612) To sustain the government expenditure, the Porte repeatedly devalued the currency. In just under four years (1828-1832), the *akçe* lost 79% of its value. (Pamuk, 2004: 463) Between 1788 and 1844, the *akçe* lost up to 90% of its value against major European currencies. (Pamuk, 2000: 193) The resulting inflation led to a threefold increase in the cost of living in the 1820s-30s. (Özmucur et al., 2003: 301) In addition to currency debasement, the Ottoman Padishahs also repeatedly ordered the confiscation of properties from nobles, merchants and landlords throughout the 18th century, especially in 1770-1839. The financial calamity was finally brought under control with the issuance of the *Tanzimât Fermânı* (Reform Ordinance), which initiated a period of Western-style reform.

### 2. Tanzimat Movement – the reform and consolidation of the Ottoman Empire (1839-1876)

Padishah Mahmud II passed away during a period when the fate of the Empire was hung in the balance. The war with Muhammad Ali Pasha, Egypt's unruly governor, was going poorly. Faced with unprecedented situation, the *vezirs* led by Mustafa Reshid Pasha (1800-1858) swiftly enthroned Padishah Abdulmecid (1839-1861) on the throne and hastily issued the *Tanzimât Fermânı* (Reform Ordinance). The move aimed to assert the reformist agenda within the Ottoman court, gather support from the progressive factions to protect the Porte, and appeal for assistance from the Western powers. The imminent threat of the Ottoman Empire's collapse and the risk of Russian control of the Bosphorus Strait, allowing access to the Mediterranean, alarmed Western political circles. Consequently, the Western powers rapidly intervened, leading to the signing of the Convention of London in 1840. Muhammad Ali Pasha had to agree to shrink the army, pledge loyalty to Constantinople, and return the Near East to the Porte in exchange for the hereditary status of Egypt's viceroy. (Berger, 1960: 11)

The Oriental Crisis (1840) was a bitter pill to swallow for the Ottoman Empire. A regional governor, commanding an army trained by Western officers, decisively defeated his master's half-reformed armies. This crisis nearly led to the Empire's collapse, prompting Western powers to intervene and prevent the Porte from being completely defeated. The Ottomans also became acutely aware of Western technological superiority and realized their importance on the international political chessboard. The Porte recognized that its strategic geographical position could be leveraged to its advantage, using the rivalries and conflicts among the great powers to secure the best possible outcomes as well as freedom of actions. A general mentality prevailed over most of the Ottoman elite that reform was inevitable in order to sustain the Empire.

Beyond the stereotypes and paradigms of the “*traditional*” reform and restabilize policies in history, the ministers led by Mustafa Reshid Pasha established a new direction and cemented the position of a new government.

Instead of reverting back to the “*traditional*” norms of the 17th century or to the situational reforms of the 18th, the Ottomans simultaneously dealt with Western pressures and rising separatist tendencies while formulating principles for a new, more secular regime. To achieve this, the reformist ministers urged Padishah Abdulmecid and Mahmud II to grant more equal rights to their subjects of different religions. This measure was approved by the Padishahs, as Mahmud II himself said: “*I distinguish my Muslim subjects in the mosque, my Christian subjects in the church, and my Jewish subjects in the synagogue, but there is no other difference among them. My love and justice for all of them is very strong and they are all my true children.*” (Shaw, 1977: 59)

Mustafa Reshid Pasha, the father of the Tanzimat, concluded: “*We do not possess the necessary [military] power to maintain the territorial integrity of our state. Consequently, it is our [geographical] position which shall help us preserve [that integrity]. [In order to do so] we must build a good administration. The foreign states shall not leave us in peace. All states aspire to possess Istanbul but the city is indivisible. If we are not able to produce a good administration [the foreign powers] will establish a joint administration [in Istanbul] too.*” (Karpas, 2001: 190) From there, based on four key pillars: Islam, the Osmanli family, the central court and Constantinople; the Tanzimat reform was enacted. While the role of Islam was maintained, Muslims and adherents of other religions were recognized. The ministers themselves acknowledged the limitations of Islam, as Mehmed Fuad Pasha said: “*Islam was for centuries, in its environment, a wonderful instrument of progress,...Today it is a clock which is behind time and must be set.*” (Davison, 1963: 90) The Osmanli family continued to rule as a symbol of unity, even though the Padishahs often retreated to the background and assumed a more nominal and diplomatic role. The central court was restructured into new, more modern divisions, although the office of *Şeyhülislam* remained unchanged. Constantinople became a hub for foreign embassies, while still being recognized as an integral territory of the Empire. For nearly four decades, the Ottomans grandees flexibly navigated their foreign relations amidst the confrontations between the Western empires, owing to their holding on to a strategically significant position.

Above all, the Tanzimat aimed to address the stagnation of the empire and to counteract the growing pressure from foreign powers. Domestically, the Tanzimat represented the Ottomans' ambition to exert more direct control over their subjects through a more centralized bureaucratic government. Another key goal was to unite the diverse ethnic and religious groups in the Empire by granting equal rights and religious freedom, thereby reducing the risk of rebellion, limiting opportunities for external forces to interfere in Ottoman internal affairs. The Tanzimat reforms also reflected the Ottomans' fear of Western intervention in the Empire; especially after the Crimean War. The Ottomans aimed to reassure the great powers on the progress of the

reforms, and that the Empire's integration into the European political landscape. By doing so, they hoped to continue their reforms without external interference, ensuring the stability and modernization of the Empire while mitigating the risk of foreign domination.

*The Porte since the 1830s had recognized that military reforms had necessitated broader reforms, especially in the field of justice and administration.*

Whereas earlier efforts focused purely on military manners, such as raising armies, buying weapons, and hiring European officers, the Ottomans came to understand that modern army operations required comprehensive modern educational, managerial, logistical, and financial systems. To legitimize these reforms, the Ottomans recognized the necessity of overhauling the judicial system first. The Ottoman ministers constantly emphasized the urgent need to implement a judicial system in accordance with the current situation, and harmonize the goal of leveling the playing field of the great powers with the maintenance of stability and social order. (Findley, 2008: 17) Even with the recognition as a European state, the Ottomans continued to push for judicial reforms, culminating in the promulgation of a formal constitution. In essence, although judicial reform aimed at ensuring equality for the subjects irrespective of religion, the court still preserved the dominant role of Islam in the Empire. The edicts of *Tanzimât Fermânı* (1839), *Islahat Fermanı* (1856) and the Ottoman Constitution (1876) echo the spirit of Islam or sanctified according to the codes of *Sharia*. The *ulema* (clergy) continued to hold important positions in the religious judicial system, while a secular legal system (*kanunnamesi* or *rule of law*) was established in parallel. The Ottoman Empire continued to delineate its polity as a secular state, although it had to accept the reservation of much power to the Muslim clergy in the fields of religious justice and the *madrasas*.

The Ottoman administration adapted to effectively address new challenges of the time. Padishahs Abdulmecid (1839-61) and Abdülaziz (1861-76) sought to modernize royal life to better align with the evolving Ottoman society. Leaving Topkapi to the princes and courtiers, they moved to Dolmabahce on the Bosphorus. *The Padishahs' move to Dolmabahce was seen as a break with a stagnant past and a puppet between factions, looking forward to a future of innovation and modernity.* After centuries of isolating themselves behind the curtains, the Padishahs had stepped out of the harem walls, scouted the capital and localities, and made trips abroad. (Shaw, 1977: 83) This is a real difference from the Padishahs of the past, when isolation enhanced the glow of awe and splendor that was a tradition in which subjects were commanded to venerate their rulers. This new approach, accompanied by a transfer of power to the royal court, led to the reduction of Padishah's power for more than half a century.

A series of measures, implemented into two steps, was enacted to address the increasingly ineffective state of local

governance. First, the central court revoked the right to collect taxes that had been assigned to the governors and local officials, in order to force them to depend more on the central court, increase the income for the state treasury, and ensure fairer taxation for the people. Second, to mitigate the risk of secession, advisory councils are built based on balancing the number of Muslim and non-Muslim members in these councils. (Shaw, 1977: 84-5) Finally, in 1864, the Ottoman court issued the official letter *Teskil-i Vilayet Nizamnamesi* (Establishment of the province). (Shaw, 1977: 89-90) (Findley, 1980: 27) The entire *Eyalet* system, which was restructured into the *Vilayet* system remained the same in its foundational aspects, however, the dominant power was now in the hands of the central government. This subjugation was seen as a turning point in the reform of political institutions in the Ottoman Empire, laying the groundwork for local administration until the fall of the Empire. Not content to just overhaul the administrative system, the Ottoman court also dismissed most of the *beylerbeyi* (governor). By 1876, essentially the entire *Eyalet* system had been converted to the *Vilayet* system, with 27 *vilayets* headed by *wali* (governors) and 1 *hidiviyet* (viceroyn territory) being Egypt. (Davison, 1963: 157-59)

Although often under pressure in the struggle for powers between many rising European powers, the Ottomans themselves also skillfully exploited many opportunities from the confrontation and conflicts of interests between these powers in their favor. Acutely aware of significant political and military challenges, such as the Crimean War (1853-1856), the Porte urgently built up an elite military force following the European model, which included both naval and defensive upgrades. According to the British consul in Aleppo in 1851, the Ottoman army had “123,000 actives, and 212,000 effective reserves (total 335,000) in the army, but raised the figure to 365,000 by including four detached corp” (Aksan, 2013: 412) It can be asserted that, in a relatively short time, the Ottoman Empire had built up a strong-armed force. Not only did it enable the Ottomans to suppress secessionist efforts at home, but it also helped the Empire fend off external threats.

The Crimean war had demonstrated the success of the military reform, with the Ottoman army won a series of battles against the Russian in European theater of war, such as the battle of Oltenista, battle of Calafat, and the pinnacle achievement of the war - the defense of Silistra fort in 1854. The Ottoman victory at Silistra had been attributed by Friedrich Engels as “the most important among all the military events since the beginning of the war. It is the failure to take that fortress which renders the campaign a failure for the Russians and adds disgrace and the Czar's disfavor to the retreat behind the Sereth, in which they are now engaged.” (Engels; 1993a: 339-40) or the praises he gave to the excellent performance of the Ottoman troop “They [Russians] could not take a yard of contested ground from the Turks; they could not take Kalafat; they could not beat the Turks in one single

*engagement*” and “*The Turks are fit for sudden starts of offensive action, and stubborn resistance on the defensive...*” (Marx và cộng sự; 1993: 406-07). The success of the reformed Ottoman legions in the European theater stood in stark contrast to the dismal failures on the Caucasus-Armenian front, which was held by the traditional army. This disparity motivated the central government to pursue further comprehensive military reforms. The Great Eastern Crisis (1875-1877) illustrated the stellar performance and capabilities of the Ottoman military, particularly during the full-scale Russian invasion of the Ottoman Empire. Despite being outnumbered and stretched thin across the empire, Ottoman forces under the command of Osman Nuri Pasha tenaciously defended the fort of Plevna against the joint Russian-Romanian army. Their resilience helped delay the Russian advance, buying crucial time for Western intervention before the Russians could reach Constantinople.

The Ottoman tax system underwent significant restructuring to shift the tax burden from impoverished farmers and urban workers to the wealthier bourgeoisie. This reform eliminated indirect taxation and intermediaries, redistributed government wages within the court, and abolished ancient tax exemption privileges. All traditional taxes were removed, except for the livestock tax (*agnam resmi*) and the *cizye* (a special tax paid by non-Muslim subjects). The *öşür* tax (a tithe) was standardized as the agricultural tax and enforced across the empire (Palairat, 1977: 41). The removal of local warlords, the abandonment of food price control measures, and the enhancement of property rights contributed significantly to the success of Ottoman agriculture (Aytekin, 2012). As a result, between 1848 and 1876, treasury revenue tripled, with the *öşür* tax alone quadrupling its contribution to state coffers (Hanioglu, 2008: 34; Shaw, 1975: 42).

One significant aspect of the Tanzimat reforms was the promotion of industrialization. The Empire's traditional crafts industry was on the brink of collapse due to fierce competition from Western products and the oppression by powerful ancient guilds. Consequently, modernizing the industry became tied to the construction of new factories, significantly reducing the guild's influence and overreach. Padishah Abdulmecid I had authorized the importation of Western machinery and techniques, resulting in the establishment of several enterprises by the end of his reign. These factories primarily produced garments, but there was also a weapon and ammunition factory in Tophane and a glass factory in Incekoy.

In conjunction with state-owned factories, private factories—funded by both Ottoman and foreign investors—were established across the empire, contributing to 19th-century Ottoman economic growth. The textile industry, which had declined due to competition from British goods, saw a resurgence. Silk weaving factories were set up in Bursa and Beirut, followed by others in Afyon and Izmir (Khater, 2001: 26-31; Quataert, 1992: 116-33). Olive oil and soap



production were industrially produced in the Nablus region (Palestine). Ottoman private investors also constructed textile factories in Mudanya, Bilecik, and silk weaving factories in Konya, Diyarbakir, Damascus, and Aleppo, as well as carpet weaving factories in Bursa, Karaman, Damascus, Vidin, Bosna, Salonica, Aydin, Sivas, Silistria, and Nish (Hanioglu, 2008: 34; Palaiet, 1997: 63-69, 76-81).

To better manage mining profits, the Ottoman court replaced the principle of a 20% profit share from mines with the nationalization of all mining areas after 1858. The 1861 mining regulations nationalized mineral mines but allowed private investment in mines on private land, with the state managing open-pit and public land mines. Due to insufficient capital and capability, the state also leased public land mines to private entities, retaining a share of the profits. This policy led to the exploitation of significant coal mines in Zonguldak, and iron, lead, silver, and copper mines in both Rumeli and Anatolia, as well as lignite mines near Bursa and Kastamonu, and copper mines near Malatya. While the imperial treasury benefited from these taxes, land rental fees, and a small portion of extracted resources, most of these resources were transported to support European industries rather than the development of heavy industry within the Ottoman Empire.

### 3. The Ottoman Empire's Reaction to Western Powers

In the Tanzimat period, in the context of the rising Western powers' expansionism and colonialism, the Ottoman empire had to uphold existing diplomatic relationships and cultivated new ones with the West. In the process of choosing the appropriate strategy to adapt with the rising Western order, the Ottomans leveraged their experience to form a few accurate and objective judgments about the situation. Following the decisive defeat by the Russians in Danube (1789) and in Adrianople (1827), Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and Palestine (1798), the battle of Navarino (1827); the Sublime Porte finally came to the conclusion that the empire lacked military strength to withstand the West. The Ottomans came to accept the harsh reality that global power dynamics were now dictated by those they had previously despised, and the Empire's survival hinged on fostering relationships with these Western powers, leading to reforms aimed at appeasing them.

On the basis of reports from envoys sent to Europe, the Sublime Porte formulated their diplomatic policies, considering diplomacy as the most effective method to ensure reforms were carried out as well as preventing unnecessary conflicts. For the first time in Ottomans history, civilian officials gained the upper hand over military bureaucracy. This shift was facilitated by the success of diplomatic officials in garnering international support during the war with Russia (1853-1856). Western powers realized that the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of disintegration and the rising threat posed by the ever expansionist Russian Empire, which was disrupting the fragile European stability established after the Napoleonic Wars. For the Western

empires, the Sickman of Europe embodied various conflicts of interests in economics, politics and most importantly, the European balance of power since the Treaty of Westphalia. Therefore, each nation has its own ambitions and perspectives regarding the Ottoman Empire, known as the Eastern Question. Aware of its position in the European and the international system, the Ottoman Empire sought to apply the principles of balance of power and neutralization of relationships to some extent. The Ottoman administration also endeavored to establish and strengthen their strong alliances with Western powers.

Evidently, the Russians had manifested to become the greatest threats to the existence of the Ottoman Empire, due to the defeat by the Russians in 1774 in which initiated the Eastern Question. The Russian Empire's ambition to redistribute the territories of the Ottoman Empire which were increasingly showing its centrifugation towards the Ottoman imperial cores, especially in the Balkan peninsula and the Armenian region. The massive southward march of the Tsar's armies toward the Balkans and the Caucasus was not simply for economic and political purposes, but also for historical and religious aspirations. These marches were seen as revenge for the memories of the Tatar shackles and chains on Russia, as well as the realization of Orthodox Russians' long-held desire to reconquer Constantinople and restore the cross in Hagia Sofia. By the time of the Tanzimat reforms, the Russians had once again defeated the Ottomans in 1829, forcing Padishah Mahmud II to accept the Tsar's protection over Christian subjects. Subsequently, Russia continued its aggressive stance, including during the Crimean War and by inciting Balkan rebellions in 1876-78.

Facing the severe calamity, the Ottomans undertook legal reforms to ensure equal rights for Christian subjects and to maintain the influence and position of the Greek Orthodox Church, thus denying Russia a *casus belli* for wars. As early as 1839, the Ottoman court declared "All subjects of our Great State, both Muslims and those from other millets, will enjoy the rights without any exceptions. any other." (Khatir, 2010: 13-14) Reaffirming the commitment, Padishah Abdulmecid I proclaimed in the 1856 *Islahat Fermani* edict that "*All the spiritual privileges and inviolability were favored by our ancestors. ancient times to the years to come, granted to you, insofar as the agreements with all Christian and non-Moslem communities established in the territory of my empire under my protection, all will guaranteed and maintained.*" (Abdulmecid I, 1856) Places of worship were allowed to freely repair and build, provided the court was notified in advance and a supervisor appointed. Finally, community leaders continued to be assigned to religious officials of that religion. For the first time in Ottoman history, non-Muslims could enter the civil service ranks of the Ottoman Empire. All subjects in the empire were given the right to attend both civil and military schools, as well as being allowed to legally own property. (Deringil, 2000) Along with that, millets were allowed to establish public schools of

science, arts and industry, but teaching methods would have to be approved by an appraisal board and teaching professors would be personally approved by the Padishah. These reforms were in line with the commitments made by the Ottoman Empire in the Treaty of Paris (1856). (Abdulmecid I, 1856)

Besides the recognition of equal rights to non-Muslim subjects, the Ottomans had strengthened their military forces at the border, ready to deal with any threatening moves from the Russians. Vezir-i Azam Fuad Pasha did not hesitate to affirm that Russians pressure would never disappear, no matter how amenable the relations between the Ottoman courts with the Tsar was. He also commented: "Were I to be a Russian, I would not hesitate to turn the whole world upside down just to capture Constantinople." (Hanioglu, 2008: 77) To block the Russians expansion, the Ottomans had to strengthen its defenses as well as maintaining official defensive alliances. A series of forts and fortifications were built along the Danube, the Black Sea, and the Bosphorus in Europe, while fortresses were reinforced and expanded at Kars and Erzurum to protect Northeastern Anatolia from Russian advance across the Caucasus. Constantinople, the heart of the Empire and the World's Desire, was upgraded and fortified by 13 fortresses and a 300-gun field. Such an impressive defensive fortification was one of the reasons why the Russians did not dare to risk marching deeper into Ottoman territories to capture Constantinople from Varna, instead they shifted their goal to occupy and consolidate areas along the Danube.

During this time, the Ottomans treated the Austrian empire with caution. Vienna itself shared similar visions with Constantinople. For the Habsburgs, the Ottomans were long-standing rivals and the two had engaged at times in a long-standing confrontation that began from the 14th century and was inconclusive throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries. The Eastern question was one of the consequential controversies on the agenda in Vienna. Splitting the Ottoman Empire and taking over the Balkans or maintaining the status quo was always in question. Despite its territorial ambitions in the Balkans, Austria realized that with the unchecked expansionist policy of Russia, the Ottoman Empire, though weakened and misguided in its governance, was their best neighbor. (Bridge, 1984: 31) Therefore, maintaining the status quo of the Ottoman Empire was necessary for the Austrian empire, in addition to providing protection and "sharing responsibility for policing" in some areas in Bosnia and Serbia. The Ottomans themselves soon realized that the Austrian empire was also facing the same problems with nationalism and separatism, so it was difficult to make a realistic threat. Therefore, in many cases, the Ottomans were willing to take action to protect their right to self-determination and independence in domestic and foreign affairs. For example, the Ottoman court refused the request of both Austria and Russia to hand over exiled Polish and Hungarian revolutionaries in 1848. (Hanioglu, 2008: 77) - a

diplomatic move highly appreciated by Western liberals as a testament to the reform's progress in the Ottoman Empire. The image of the Ottoman Empire improved in European public opinion, and this prompted public pressure on Britain and France to side with the Ottomans in the Crimean War, and forced the Austrians to refuse the call. The Russians joined the war because they did not want to be engulfed by a wave of domestic revolution. (Engels, 1993b: 16)

The French-Ottoman alliance was established as early as the 1520s, among the earliest diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and a Western power. The alliance was initiated owing to the coalescence of interest in defeating their shared adversary - the House of Habsburg of Austria. The alliance was first initiated by the aid requests from Francis I (1515-1547), then formally cemented and recognized in 1526. From then on, French monarchs worked tirelessly to perpetuate the alliance in the centuries that followed. (İnalçık, 2017: 133-134, 146-147). However, the relations deteriorated during the French revolution, and were at the lowest point in Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. The withdrawal of the French army precipitated an even greater shock than their initiated invasion. The British naval power had successfully cut off the French's supply lines, compelling Napoleon to abandon the whole enterprise - an objective in which Padishah Selim III's abysmal military failed to accomplish. In this moment of embarrassment, the Porte were forced to acknowledge the twin harsh realities - they cannot resist a European conquest in their core territories, and only by another European power's intervention lies the hope for their sovereignty's preservation. By the year of 1830, the French's colonial ambitions in the Ottoman territory had been realized once again, this time with success in Algeria. The French had triumphantly hoisted their tri-colour flag over Algiers, subduing the Barbary pirates - Padishah's loyal vassal for centuries, thus severing Western Mediterranean from Ottoman's sphere of influence. Thus for Paris, their Eastern aspirations were to block British access to India, either via a total monopolization of power in the Levant and Egypt, or by supporting Muhammad Ali Pasha's bid to become the new ruler of the Ottoman Empire. The diplomatic relations were significantly ameliorated thanks to the Ottoman effort, especially after the Crimean war when the French intervened on the Empire's behalf; however, the Ottoman were harbored no illusions about securing any form of permanent security guarantee from Paris, as a cordial diplomatic relationship merely ensured that French power would not throw in their lot with hostile forces.

The British, however, was the long-standing partner of the Empire, and became a key ally from the 1830s onwards. Similar to the French, the Habsburg posed a threat to both the Ottoman and British interests in Europe, thus providing a common cause for an alliance established in the second half of the 16th century. (Barton et al., 1983) Unlike the French however, London's maritime empire concentrated only around small coastal areas along the Arabian Peninsula and

they painstakingly avoided interference with the sacred sites. The British saw the Ottoman Empire as a cornerstone of the European balance of power, of which the Russian's ambition in the Mediterranean was checked. The British Empire - entering its golden era - and the Ottoman Empire - the Sickman of Europe, both strengthening their relationship, recognizing their mutual interest - the Ottoman desperately needed a security guarantor, while the British perceived the Ottoman as a reliable partner which helped protect British Indian trade against hostile intervention. Thus maintaining Ottoman territorial integrity and sovereignty was one of the main pillars of British foreign policy until the outbreak of World War I. (Lewis, 2008: 324) Ottoman ministers understood how the Porte's claim to the first-power status as well as their imperial sovereignty were in every respect, depended on the British's goodwill, thus no expense was spared in sustaining the British-Ottoman alliance. In his last letters, Fuad Pasha advised the Padishah and the Ottoman court that "it is preferable for us to relinquish inconsequential lands than to risk the British abandonment." (Hanioglu, 2008: 77)

The Sublime Porte was determined to project their indispensable influence on European political landscapes and seek recognition as equal partners from Western powers. In the year of 1856, this effort had paid off handsomely, when the Treaty of Paris officially offered the imperial regime a seat in the Concert of Europe. These agreements guaranteed the absolute sovereignty of the regime, which was the greatest triumph than any illustrious Ottoman moments during the Crimean war, from Russian surrender of Bessarabia, to the "liberation of the Black Sea" by the allied navy or even the pinnacle siege of Silistra - a battle that the Ottomans considered their revenge for the defeat at Adrianople in 1829. The Ottoman had successfully acquired the power to protest against, and not succumb to foreign threats. When the principality of Montenegro rose to rebellion against the Ottoman overlord (1861-62), Constantinople quickly suppressed the secessionists before the Russians could intervene. This event affirmed the Ottoman absolute sovereignty over her imperium. Even in Sumatra, when the Dutch invaded the Sultanate of Aceh, the Ottomans sent a note of protest to all European embassies. Although no fleet had been dispatched, weapons and support equipment were sent to aid the Acehnese in their struggle. (Woltring, 1962: 612) When the Ottomans were defeated in the war of 1877 - 1878, though financial woes and enormous debt had sullied the empire's prestige in Europe, yet, despite these setbacks, Western public harbored no desires to witness a crumbling Ottoman regime. The sight of Russian warships set sail straight to the Suez canal unopposed stirred a sense of urgency and the realization that European geopolitical stakes were hung in the balance. As Engel observed: "The whole Eastern problem boils down to the following two-way situation: either the Russians enter Constantinople, or the status quo is maintained. Besides that choice, they [European

diplomats and press] can think of no other way." (Engels, 1993c: 38) Thus, the European triumvirate - British Empire, France, German Empire- once again convened diplomatic talks in Berlin, compelling the Russians and Ottoman to sign the treaty of Berlin in 1878. This treaty dictated the annulment of the unequal agreement imposed by Russia in 1877, in exchange for the Ottomans granting independence to Bulgaria and Romania. As for the Ottomans, the treaty provided much needed relief from the Eastern problem, though temporarily it was, ensuring the regime to remain intact. This respite gave the Empire an opportunity to pursue further reforms in the future. By 1887, the Ottomans still retained their status as a first-class power in Europe and even got the invitation to the Berlin Conference as one of the main parties in the Scramble of Africa. (Minawi, 2016) The role of the Ottomans in the Muslim world was highly appreciated by European powers, most notably when Germany requested the Ottomans to issue an order preventing Uyghurs from participating in the Qing Dynasty's war against Eight-Nation Alliance during the Boxer Rebellion (1900-01). (Karpat, 2001: 237)

### CONCLUSION

The crises of the 19th century had motivated the Ottoman Porte to execute a series of extraordinary reforms for the Westernization of the empire. In the years 1839-1876, military and judiciary reforms, as well as the overhaul of political power structure were the top priority of the Sublime Porte. These successes had transformed the entire Ottoman state in many positive aspects. Despite having to constantly hold off Western pressures, the Ottoman state was preserved and thrived prosperously by virtue of the Tanzimat reforms. Taking advantage of the Concert of Europe, the Ottoman regime pitched hostile European powers against each other, navigating the complex network of alliances, thus maintaining absolute sovereignty over her imperium and projecting power to the disputed frontiers.

While enacting these reforms, the Ottoman court recognized the difficulties of carrying out reforms simultaneously and consistently across the country. Most reforms in the Ottomans tended to be policy directives accompanied with local administrators' free reign to implement these reforms suitably to their circumstances and capabilities. There was no consistency in the method of reforms implementation, although the directives and guidelines of the Porte were held with utmost esteem and absolute. Ottoman policies were regularly changed depending on international and domestic situations, thus derisking the probability of social disturbances as well as arousing opposition from important political classes. By allowing a degree of freedom for local interpretations of the reform policies, the success of the Tanzimat reforms was guaranteed, as these measures would foster local stability, prevent rising oppositions, and facilitated partial reforms of the empire in appropriate manner. The Tanzimat encountered virtually no

opposition, as the purges of janissaries and local lords in the 1820s and 30s served as a warning to anti-reform forces that dared to challenge imperial power and prevent reform from taking place. Therefore, the uprising of local officials and warlords in Albania led by Dervish Cara in 1844 can be considered as the last breath of a dying system of self-government, as well as the last resistance of once powerful conservative figures.

Finally, on the regime's participation in the Concert of Europe, the Tanzimat reform illustrated a consequential transformation of the Ottoman perception towards the West. Previously the goal of reform was to regain the Ottoman supremacy in military power and then resist against the West. Now the Ottomans strived to maintain good relations with the West as well as building a modern Westernized nation in a world, where European powers usurped total domination on the globe. Under the Tanzimat era, the Ottoman Empire finally established itself as a European nation, an ambition that many generations of Ottomans had endeavored with futility. This recognition was solidified by the Treaty of Paris in 1856 and affirmed by Ottoman officials themselves, as Midhat Pasha, the Ottoman constitutional hero, wrote: "*The Ottoman state is part of the European community, therefore we must adhere to the principles in which European countries use to achieve equality with their neighbor.*" (Kedourie, 1992: 39) The empire gradually regained its prestige in the system of international relations, both with the West and with the Muslim world. The transformation of the Ottoman Empire became a role model for Muslim states. From then on, the Ottomans were seen as the rallying flag for Muslim powers across the globe against the expansion of the Christian West. The existence of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries as one of the last independent Muslim powers encouraged Muslim solidarity at a time when the West sought to realize its colonial ambitions and market conquest. Until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Devlet-i 'Alīye-yi 'Osmāniye were a bastions for Muslim patriots, who advocated for a global religious unity to prevent expansion and Western invasion.

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