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Turkey's entry into the Concert of Europe

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From the start, Turkey's aspirations to join the European Union aroused considerable opposition. Recently, the debate has focused increasingly on supposed disparities in the spheres of culture, politics or mentality, implying that this Muslim country would not be able to comply with European norms and values. Supporters of Turkey's candidacy, on the other hand, have pointed out that Turkey has always been an important element of the European balance of power and was, in the nineteenth century, even a member of the Concert of Europe. Both sides invoke history to justify their arguments. The present paper examines the evolution of the European state system and the major stages in the history of the Turkish–European relationship, with a view to arriving at a more balanced judgement. It can be shown that new concepts, such as state interest and balance of power, had already begun in the sixteenth century to undermine the old theological worldview and, beginning with the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was treated – at least de facto – as an actor that observed fully the norms of European public law (*jus publicum Europeum*). However, a de jure recognition of the Empire's status had to wait until the Treaty of Paris (1856), but even then it did not include an effective guarantee of Ottoman territorial integrity.

Turkey's relationship with Europe entered a new phase when Ankara's application for full membership in the European Union was endorsed by the EU by granting Turkey candidate status at the Helsinki summit in December 1999. Quite understandably, this development gave a new impetus to the already lively discussion of the Turkish problem, attracting contributions and comments from a wide spectrum of opinion leaders – academics, businessmen and politicians. Central to these debates is the question of whether Turkey can be considered part of Europe or compatible with the values associated with Europe. The German historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler, for example, maintains that Turkey, due

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to its geographic location, history, religion, culture and mentality, does not belong to Europe, and Wolfgang Schäuble, minister in the government of Helmut Kohl and currently deputy head of the CDU/CSU group in the Bundestag, deems the time has come to focus on 'the meaning of European identity', instead of talking about Turkey's membership in the European Union, a country that hardly shares 'Europe's heritage and geography'.[1,2] Turkish historical writing and political propaganda, on the other hand, is bent on invalidating Western stereotypes that accentuate the 'otherness' of the Ottoman Turk, stressing only those moments and traits in the history of the Turko-European relationship that show the Ottoman past in a positive light, such as the sultan offering shelter to the Jews expelled from Spain after 1492, François I's alliance with Süleyman the Magnificent in the 1530s, or the admission of the Ottoman Empire into the Concert of Europe in 1856. The last-mentioned event, in particular, is viewed as proving beyond doubt that the Ottoman Empire had a European mission and that its constructive role within the family of European states had been universally acknowledged.[3–5]

The following exposition starts with a summary of the major stages in the history of the European state-system from its origins in the early modern period, when the concept of 'balance of power' first came up, to the doctrine of European great powers acting in concert with a view to preserving collectively the peace and the socio-political order of the continent in the early nineteenth century. Against this background, Ottoman efforts to join the illustrious club of the European great powers are discussed.

European Balance of Power

The Ottoman ascent to imperial grandeur with an accompanying capability of exercising a significant influence on European affairs dates from the early part of the sixteenth century.[6,7] This was the time when the Ottomans encountered the Habsburgs both in Southeastern Europe and in the Mediterranean as their chief rivals. Interestingly however, this confrontation was not entirely a religious one, that is to say, between Christianity and Islam, notwithstanding the ideology of the medieval holy war that continued to play an important role on both sides.[8–10] It seems that the Protestant Reformation was greeted in Istanbul not only as a religious movement supposedly congenial to Islam, but also as an opposition movement against the imperial authority of Charles V.[11] One historian has even argued that 'the Infidel Turk was, in fact, the probable saviour of Protestantism in Germany and the ultimate guarantor of Protestant interests in Hungary and Transylvania.'[12]

But more and more rulers in contemporary Europe, who were influenced by Machiavelli's ideas, had arrived by this time at a new appreciation of politics; they

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perceived themselves no longer as members of a corporate body of Christian princedoms, nor did they act in conformity with exclusively Christian moral and legal principles. New concepts such as state interest and balance of power had begun to undermine the old theological worldview.[13–17] In short, 'nation-states' were in the ascendancy. France, England, the Dutch Republic, and Sweden all pursued 'national' policies, which more often than not contradicted the interests of the Holy Roman Empire, represented by the House of Habsburg. To early modern princes and statesmen of Europe, the Ottoman Empire was no longer the Islamic theocracy par excellence; on the contrary, many saw in it a model of an absolute monarchy.[18] At any rate, the Grand Seigneur was someone to be reckoned with, be it as an ally or as a foe. Conversely, the Shiite Safavi state in Persia, which had proven itself to be an equal match to the Ottomans, appeared to European enemies of the sultan as an ideal partner.[19–20]

In literature, it has rightly been pointed out that, with respect to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one should differentiate between two types of balance of power, one European and one European-Ottoman. Until the Ottoman defeat before Vienna in 1683, the Porte's continental policy hardly aimed at 'the preservation of the European equilibrium but rather the change of the European-Ottoman balance of power in favour of Istanbul.'[21] In this connection, some authors also emphasize the Porte's unwillingness to observe the rules of the European state system, for example its disregard for reciprocity, which was manifested, among other things, in the abstention from establishing permanent embassies in European capitals, whereas all major Christian powers had their resident representatives in Istanbul.[22]

The Ottoman debacle before Vienna in 1683 and then defeats against the armies of the Holy League until the conclusion of the Peace of Carlowitz in 1699 seem to have brought about a significant shift in this context. The Ottoman elites were now aware of the fact 'that they had been overwhelmed by a superior military power. The acknowledgement of defeat became the stimulus for the rise of a new attitude.'[23] As R. A. Abou-El-Haj has observed, the 'negotiated agreements of 1699 and 1700 implied in their territorial delimitations at least two modern principles of international law: acceptance of a political boundary and adherence to the concept of the inviolability of the territory of a sovereign state.' In other words, the Sublime Porte had recognized the primacy of peace in her relations with Europe and was prepared to accept even loss of territory for the sake of peace.[24,25] H. Duchhardt has pointed out that with the Peace of Carlowitz the Ottoman Empire had renounced its ideological positions and had accepted (i) the equality of contracting states as a matter of principle, (ii) a Christian power as a mediator, and (iii) a neutral ground as the location of negotiations – all important norms of *jus publicum Europeum*. It was evident that the Porte had begun to partake in the normal life of the European state system, and, especially with the

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subsequent Peace of Passarowitz (1718), the process of Europeanization of Turkey had become virtually irreversible.[26–28]

During the so-called Tulip Era (1718–1730), France was the first source of inspiration. In contrast to earlier practices, innovations were no longer disguised as a return to classical Islamic civilization but openly presented as something new. Once receptivity to European ideas was recognized as crucial to the preservation of the empire's integrity, the Sublime Porte began sending envoys to western capitals. They were expected to report about the country, the way of life of the people and any important developments. Best known among them was the report by Mehmed Said Efendi describing his stay in France in the years 1720–1721.[29,30] As a result of closer contacts with Europe, 'taste itself changed from the all-permeating style emanating from a central body of court designers to a broader appreciation of other artistic concepts'.[31,32] The new urban elites were not ashamed of a luxurious lifestyle, and the literature of the period was characterized by an outrightly hedonistic worldview.[33–35]

The sultans reigning during this period, as well as in the subsequent decades of the century, remained deeply committed to peace. For example, they did not try to take advantage of the difficult situation of the Habsburgs during the War of Austrian Succession (1741–48).[36] Similarly, on the eve of the Seven Years War (1756–1763), at the end of which Europe was to experience a *renversement des alliances*, Ottoman diplomacy withstood various enticements and successfully kept the Empire out of a general European entanglement.[37] Such an attitude of caution and restraint, adopted by the foremost Islamic state of the era, must have impressed the contemporaries. Thus the flourishing 'sciences of state', which themselves were a result of a de-sacralization of political life in the early modern period, automatically included Turkey in their descriptions of Europe.[38] Authors of encyclopaedias and dictionaries published in the eighteenth century, though rather hesitant about classifying the large eastern empires of the Romanovs and the Ottomans as European without reservation, left nevertheless no room for any doubts about the European character both of the Russians and the Turks. The Islamic aspect of the Ottoman–Turkish culture does not appear to have been perceived as a disqualifying criterion in this regard, which is somewhat understandable, considering that in that period Islam was the second major religion in Europe after Christianity.[39]

However, the reverse was that, while the Ottoman adaptation to the rules of the European system thus made remarkable *factual* progress, *de jure* the Empire continued to be treated as an infidel outsider. In other words, as an element of European equilibrium the Ottomans were welcome, but the moment they attempted to play an active role within Europe, as when they tried to mediate during the Wars of Austrian Succession, they encountered only scorn and mockery. Significantly, the Porte was not invited to any of the great international

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conferences of the eighteenth century, even worse, there was scarce willingness on the part of European governments to show the same consideration for Ottoman susceptibilities as regards independence and territorial integrity, which they demanded for themselves.[40–42,22]

The partition of Poland and the Ottoman Empire

That preserving the balance of power constituted an important aspect of Ottoman policy during the eighteenth century is rarely understood. On the contrary, there can be observed a tendency to represent the Ottoman Porte as a mere instrument in the service of Europe, especially of the French doctrine of *Barrière de l'est.*[43] It is no surprise, therefore, that the significance of the crisis of Polish succession in 1764 from the standpoint of the Ottoman politics of the balance of power has hardly been appreciated. Generally, historians point out either the French intrigues in Istanbul or the corruption of Ottoman statesmen as the decisive factors when they try to explain why the Ottoman Empire, after a long period of peace, declared war on Russia in 1768.[44,45] One cause of this situation could perhaps be located in the tendency to assume that some mysterious powers operating behind the scenes determined the policies of the Porte. Contemporary Western observers had but scant knowledge of the mechanisms of decision-making in respect to Ottoman foreign policy in the eighteenth century:

> How, and for what reasons did the Ottomans determine policy and strategy? How did they judge their choices to be the right ones for the world as they conceived it to be? Observers took the motivating factors for granted. These lay in the Turks' Scythian origins, or in the compulsions of Islam, or in simple avarice, vengeance, or bloodthirstiness. But for particular cases, large and small, such as the rationale of Ottoman policy towards the English, there was silence.[46]

Modern historians, too, probe more or less in the dark. One commentator attributes the Ottoman bellicosity in 1768 to the eruption of some irrational forces that caught public imagination, that is to say, Muslim fanaticism: 'The sudden declaration of war had been the outcome of one of the bursts of national-religious passion which were liable to take control of Turkish policy at moments of crisis, and the demand, at least in Constantinople, for a vigorous prosecution of the struggle was temporarily irresistible.'[47] Biographical studies of statesmen who shaped the policies of the Porte during this period being still rare, the Ottoman capital appears sucked into a solid atmosphere of anonymity, which can be set off in contrast to European individualism and rationality, and the question of why 'the Ottoman empire was not incorporated into the all-European diplomatic system' in the course of the eighteenth century can be answered by pointing out 'the vicious circle of insufficient input of information, ownerless and unorganized decision making, and passivity as major relevant factors.'[48]

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Thus, only a careful analysis of Ottoman internal relationships brings to light that 3,000,000 livres at the disposal of the French ambassador at the Porte to be distributed as *bahşiş* were not enough to induce the Ottomans to declare war on Russia in 1764. And when they declared war in 1768, they did this on their own account, 'without the need of the bribes; the money was returned unspent.'[49] Symptomatic is, finally, the notion that as late as 'in the 1790s leading Turks, with few exceptions, continued to suffer from the ludicrous ignorance of Europe which had for so long aroused the derision of western observers', so much so that they supposed Spain to be situated in Africa, or they assumed that warships could not navigate in the Baltic.[50] But the Ottoman elite of that period was certainly quite knowledgeable about both the geography and the affairs of Europe. Already during the early phase of the war of 1768–1774, we see them intensively communicating with the Swedes about the movements of the Russian Baltic fleet, albeit they were much surprised when that fleet appeared in the Mediterranean, since they had not taken into account the extent to which the British would assist the Russians.[51] As for Spain, they should have had some idea of its geographic location at least since 1787, in which year they had sent an envoy to that kingdom.[52,53]

Why the Ottomans were so much concerned about the future of Poland in the second half of the eighteenth century can be surmised from the declarations issued and concrete steps taken by the Porte. Immediately after the death of King August III in November 1763, the Ottoman government made a statement that Polish liberties should be preserved without the intervention of foreign powers. This was meant as a warning to Russia and Prussia, which were already active in promoting their candidates in Warsaw.[54,55] In a note handed to the representatives of Russia, Prussia, France and Austria, the Ottoman government reiterated its position as one of neutrality; other powers, too, should respect the traditional freedoms of the Polish nation.[56] As the political situation in Poland escalated during the winter of 1767/68 and Russia attempted to block the Polish Sejm under the pretext of defending the rights of the (Orthodox) Dissidents, the Ottoman government felt obliged to come out in support of the Polish patriots who seemed determined to fight for Poland's independence. Responsible circles in Istanbul were of the opinion that an increase of Russian influence in Poland was detrimental to Ottoman interests, so much so that a war with Russia appeared a less dangerous option.[57,58]

But the war did not develop in the direction that was hoped for at the Porte. In the face of Russian military successes, it became evident by the Fall of 1770 that the Ottoman Empire would not be able to exercise any influence on Polish affairs. At this stage, however, the extent of prospective Russian acquisitions in the south stirred Prussia and Austria to action. The spectre of a Russia firmly established in the lower Danube basin was particularly disturbing for Austria,

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whereas Prussia was counting on acquiring Polish territory by way of compensation for Russian gains from the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the search for a compromise in order to avoid a military confrontation between Vienna and Petersburg led to the idea of compensating all three continental powers at the expense of Poland, and in February/March 1772 a series of agreements were signed which concluded the first partition of Poland.[59–61]

Still, the Ottoman Empire had to bear the brunt of a catastrophic military defeat. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) established Russia as a major force in European and Near Eastern affairs and has been rightly considered as marking the beginning of the Eastern Question in modern times. Apart from gaining several ports on the Black Sea, Russia acquired for her merchant marine the right of free navigation in the Black Sea, the Straits and the Mediterranean. Especially ominous for the Ottoman government was Article VII of the treaty from which Russia in later decades deduced the right to make representations at the Porte on behalf of the Orthodox Christian subjects of the sultan.[62–64]

Equally daunting from an Ottoman point of view was the fate of Poland, the prospect of getting partitioned for the sake of European equilibrium, which could easily be the Ottomans' lot the next time. Catherine II's 'Greek Project', which took shape in the early 1780s, assumed that the dissolution of the Sultan's empire was imminent. Therefore, the neighbouring powers should make the necessary arrangements in the interest of the subject Christian peoples. The Empress was determined to drive the Turks out of Europe and appealed to Joseph II of Austria for solidarity and support. Once Constantinople was recovered, the Byzantine Empire was going to be recreated as a *secundogeniture* of the House of Romanov. Moldavia, Wallachia and Bessarabia would be united into a buffer state, which would in its turn help preserve the peace between Russia and Austria. The project found a sympathetic reception in Vienna where similar plans were in the making since 1774.[65,66] More importantly, however, France, too, the traditional western ally of the Ottomans, had begun to display a similar mood. Voltaire, Diderot or D'Alembert were unanimous in their praise of Catherine II's rule, which was depicted as enlightened, while the Sultan was represented as a fanatic, uncivilized oriental despot.[67] The idea of creating a new Greek empire as an alternative to the Russian scheme was also popular among commercial classes, especially since French colonial interests, which had suffered setbacks in Canada and India, hoped for compensation in the Mediterranean and the Near East.[68]

In short, it is important to stress in any discussion of Ottoman relations with Europe that the Ottoman Empire, which certainly had been an important element of the continental balance of power during the early modern period, had become by the end of the eighteenth century, just like Poland, an asset accessible to compensatory partition by European powers. The Porte's conviction that the fate of the Ottoman Empire and that of Poland were 'mutually connected' found a clear

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formulation in a draft Polish–Ottoman defensive alliance of 1790. The contracting parties were prompted by 'events, which have demonstrated by numerous proofs – especially since the conclusion of the alliance between the Austrians and the Russians – that the proper interests of the high state [the Ottoman Empire] and the majestic Polish republic are mutually connected, insofar that whatever act is committed against one of the two sides, it will be unavoidably reflected on the other side as well'. They therefore concluded a defensive alliance, the principal purpose of which was 'the mutual security and defence, the good condition of their exigent interests, the security of the exalted sultanate and of the Polish republic, and also the mutual right of sovereignty, the removal of any kind of meddling or interference by the foreigners, and the right of sovereignty and independence of the Polish republic'.[69] By 1795, Poland was no more, and a totally puzzled class of dignataires in the Ottoman capital had to experience the humiliation of Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt (1798). In the subsequent period of the Napoleonic Wars, the Porte was wooed both by varying anti-French coalitions and by the French as a possible partner. However, this hardly brought relief to Ottoman statesmen, their empire being regularly included as a target in rival schemes of partition.[70]

The Concert of Europe, Balkan nationalism, and the Ottoman response

The international relations in the post-Napoleonic era were dominated by the Concert of Europe, which emerged in 1815 on the basis of the Quadruple Alliance of Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia and grew into the Quintuple Alliance of 1818 when the Bourbon monarchy of France was again included. Its purpose was to maintain the status quo agreed upon at the Congress of Vienna. The concept of 'concert' as understood henceforth differed from the traditional usages of the term chiefly by a special emphasis on a new political style that was characterized by consensus to be reached through a complex network of great power congresses and ambassadorial conferences.[71–75] The Ottoman Empire, although a member of various coalitions during the Napoleonic era, had not been invited to Vienna. The reason why the Ottomans were again excluded from the European state system must be sought in the highly Christian ideology of the Holy Alliance authored by Alexander I of Russia. In this document it was stated explicitly that the signatory powers considered themselves 'all as members of one and the same Christian nation'.[76] Metternich's earlier suggestion that the European powers should guarantee the integrity of the Ottoman Empire had not found the support of the Tsar who 'would not cooperate unless changes in the Ottoman boundaries were made in Russia's favour.'[77,78]

As a result, the Ottoman Empire stood vis-à-vis a Europe that was just restored in conformity with conservative principles, but was as isolated as before. What

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exacerbated the situation further was the internal weakness of the Empire resulting from a long-drawn conflict of political legitimation. The military debacles of the late eighteenth century had entailed great loss of prestige, undermining thereby the capacity of the ruling elite to master the centrifugal tendencies in the provinces. A new type of banditry, known under the name of *Kirdjali* towards the end of the eighteenth century, coupled with fierce infighting among provincial notables (*ayan*) as well as recurrent military rebellions had led especially Danubian Bulgaria, Thrace and Macedonia into a state of virtual anarchy.[79,80] The roots of social discord that gave rise to this crisis by forcing many a provincial magnate into opposition to the imperial regime should be sought in a series of military reforms which, once successful, would have also promoted the cause of administrative centralization.[81] The new European-style infantry units established after 1792 represented a direct assault on the vested interests of the janissaries and of social groups economically associated with them. That the population at large also took on a hostile attitude made the situation particularly embarrassing for the government. The discontent of the populace was largely due to new surcharges on commodities like tobacco, wine, coffee, textiles, livestock and the like, which were introduced in order to generate additional revenue to finance the new army.[82–84]

The first showdown between the proponents of reform and the opposition occurred in Serbia, where the Porte had attempted to establish its authority since 1791.[85,86] The janissaries expelled from Belgrade found refuge in the neighbouring province of Vidin, which was under the control of Osman Pasvandoğlu, a local magnate from the janissary corps determined to settle some old scores with the central government. But Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt left the Sultan hardly any other choice than to pardon Pasvandoğlu, as all available forces were needed against the French.[87] With the French already established on the Ionian Islands in October 1797, it was only a matter of time before the virtual civil war in Rumelia attracted Great Power attention. For the French, Pasvandoğlu was a prospective ally. He could easily reciprocate, not only because he feared, on account of the involvement of his lieutenants in Serbia and Wallachia, a Russian or Austrian interference, but also because he expected that these continental empires would eventually step in to defend the Sultan against revolutionary France. In contrast, Ali Pasha of Yanina, the other great figure in the Ottoman Balkans, had to be more cautious of his French neighbours who were obviously planning to use his territory as a springboard for further conquests in the East.[88]

The internationalization of the conflicts in Rumelia became almost inevitable, once the events in Serbia began to evolve towards a general uprising, Pasvandoğlu's janissaries playing a decisive role in the process.[89] Selim III could react only by asking the Austrians to help isolate the usurpers in Belgrade and by hoping that his own man, Ebubekir Pasha of Bosnia, would successfully

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interfere in order to re-establish direct Ottoman control. He also invited the Serbs to join the Bosnian army. But the janissaries in Belgrade, their protector Pasvandoğlu Osman Pasha in Vidin, as well as the opponents of Selim III's 'New Order' throughout the empire were determined to hold out. When, in February 1804, the janissaries massacred dozens of Serbian elders for having been involved in a subversive plot, the First Serbian Uprising broke out.[90]

At first, the Serbs fought as loyal subjects of the Sultan against the janissaries, their aim being the restoration of the old privileges and self-government. But as they became increasingly successful in this struggle, Karadjordje and his men began to defy also the Sultan's representatives, and in 1806 the Serbian movement acquired the character of a general movement against Ottoman rule. The Porte was obliged to declare itself ready to recognize Serbia as an autonomous principality paying annual tribute, but the convention which defined the terms of such a compromise solution, the so-called Ičko settlement, was eventually torpedoed by Russia.[91]

The fact that France had received, by the terms of the Austro-French peace of 26 December 1805, the whole Dalmatian littoral compelled the Russian government to re-evaluate its policy regarding the developments in the Ottoman Balkans. In January 1806, Russian emissaries were sent to Bosnia and Epirus to counter any schemes of the French. The Russian foreign minister was of the opinion that the Serbs, if defeated by the Ottomans, would place themselves under the protection of the French, and this would not be compatible with the interests of imperial Russia.[92,93] To forestall such an eventuality, the government of Alexander I decided to pursue a more robust Balkan policy; consequently, in November 1806, the Danubian principalities were occupied, which induced the Porte to sever diplomatic relations with the Russian empire in December of the same year.[94] Once hostilities began, Serbia became a possible theatre of operations, and the insurgents, now encouraged by Russia, put up a new political programme demanding full independence.[95]

Ottoman elites traditionally tended to attribute political unrest to misgovernment and to seek alleviation primarily in redressing the 'evils of administration'. The ascendancy of local notables appeared to them as usurpation of legitimate power and therefore the chief cause of socio-political crises. Thus, when the First Serbian Uprising began in the opening years of the nineteenth century, the Sultan's government saw it as an expression of local discontent caused by provincial misgovernment and attempted to restore order, not least by way of arming the Serbian peasantry against the local Muslim usurpers of power. A similar approach can be observed during the Greek Uprising of 1821–1829. The men at the Porte hardly understood the revolutionary character of this event. They again attempted to destroy the power base of a local leader, Ali Pasha of Yanina, instead of concentrating all available forces against the rebellious Greeks in the south. The

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idea behind this policy was that the Pasha of Yanina could become a tool of European interests (as Mehmed Ali of Egypt was very soon to become) if not suppressed first.[96,97] Particularly baffling in this context was the phenomenon of Philhellenism with its enthusiasm for antiquity.[98–101] Only gradually did one grasp that the romantic notion of nation as an organic community with a common language, a collective soul and a shared destiny was the greatest challenge of all. Coupled with the doctrine of historical rights, a subversive movement had emerged, capable of disrupting any multicultural society. For it was crystal clear that creating a Greek kingdom at the southern tip of the Balkan peninsula, whereas the majority of Greeks lived all over the Ottoman Empire, could not be conducive to peace; future irredentism in this kingdom and its conflicts with the Ottoman Porte were inevitable.[102,103]

Yet the Ottoman statesmen had long since been cognizant of the fact that the survival of their state depended to a large extent on the goodwill of the same European powers that had imposed the Greek nation-state upon a defeated Ottoman Empire and that, for the same reason, it was necessary to improve relations with Europe and to stimulate a genuine interest in Western civilization and culture. Therefore, Ottoman statecraft aimed at achieving three goals: (i) building up a strong army (and navy); (ii) modernization of state and society; (iii) finding a diplomatic solution so that the empire would not become an object of great power policy.[104]

All three goals required time, and time was, especially in the 1830s, simply not available. Yet new constellations within the state system began to make themselves felt, and already the Egyptian crisis of 1831–1833 led to a significant shift, not at all unfavourable from the standpoint of Ottoman diplomacy. In 1829 the government of Nicholas I had reassessed Russia's Eastern policies and had come to the conclusion that the advantages of maintaining the Ottoman Empire in Europe were greater for Russia than the difficulties presented.[105] In case of a partition, Constantinople would most probably become a free city and the Straits entirely open to western naval forces. Under the prevalent conditions, only the continuation of Ottoman rule would guarantee 'the safety of Russia's Black Sea shores from British naval bombardment.'[106]

When the conflict between Mehmed Ali Pasha of Egypt and Mahmud II escalated into an open rebellion in 1831–1832 and Mehmed Ali's son marched into Anatolia threatening even the Ottoman capital, the Sultan appealed to the powers for help. France, since 1830 the occupying force in Ottoman Algeria, openly supported the Egyptian side. Britain appeared preoccupied with problems closer at hand, namely in Belgium and Portugal. Only Russia was ready to send a military force, which arrived in the Bosporus in February 1833. Despite such assistance, however, Mahmud II concluded the Convention of Kütahya (April–May 1833) with the Egyptians, granting Mehmed Ali Syria including the

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district of Adana for life.[107] Actually this was alarming news, especially for the British who feared 'a Russian seizure of Constantinople and the Straits, and the permanent closure of the Straits to British warships which that would entail, but it might also result in the creation of a powerful Egyptian empire, embracing Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia and parts of Anatolia, which would be capable … of cutting Britain's communications with India by way of the Near and Middle East.'[108] Still, the British government was rather slow in grasping the true significance of the emerging constellation and was taken by surprise, especially by the conclusion of the Russo-Ottoman Treaty of Hünkar İskelesi in July, 1833.

This defensive alliance aimed at 'securing the permanence, maintenance and entire independence of the Sublime Porte', as stated under Art. 3. A secret article stipulated that the aid the Ottomans might render to the Russians would consist of the closure of the Straits to western warships.[109] Some contemporaries, especially in Britain, believed therefore that the treaty of 1833 secured for Russia a hegemonial position at the Porte. Lord Palmerston spoke of a kind of Russian protectorate over the sultan's realm and mounted a highly effective propaganda campaign against that agreement, which marks, according to some historians, a turning point in Britain's Eastern policy.[110] Consequently, British public opinion became increasingly Russophobe and, at the end of 1830s, it also became increasingly Turkophile.[111–114] As a result, when the second Egyptian crisis broke out (1838–1839), the Porte no longer felt isolated internationally, although the Ottoman army lost practically every battle, and the fleet simply defected to the rebel governor. As the dissolution of the Empire, or rather a change in dynasty, seemed to be imminent, the Powers acted in unison and resolutely. They appealed to the Porte collectively (27 July 1839) not to take any unilateral measures against Mehmed Ali, but to trust the common interest of Europe in solving this Eastern crisis. But it soon became evident that the Powers were not really united in purpose. While the British, Austrians and Russians were determined to deprive Mehmed Ali of his Syrian possession in order to secure the survival of the Ottoman state, the French thought otherwise. They preferred to see Syria remain in the hands of the Egyptians. The French government even contemplated going to war in order to achieve its objectives in the Orient. The other three powers, on the other hand, as well as the Ottoman Empire, met in London in July 1840 to draw up a Convention for the Pacification of the Levant. (The participation of the Porte was a novelty, marking a milestone in Ottoman integration into the European system.[115]) The terms of this convention offered Mehmed Ali the hereditary possession of Egypt, together with the administration of southern Syria for life, in return for his submission to the Sultan and the sending back of the Ottoman fleet.[116] However, encouraged by the French, Mehmed Ali remained defiant. This entailed a naval blockade of Syria and Lebanon by the British and Austrian fleets, while a combined force of Ottoman and British troops, supported by Lebanese

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rebels, defeated Ibrahim Pasha's Egyptian army (October 1840). In late November, following the appearance of a British fleet before Alexandria, Mehmed Ali was obliged to accept the terms of the offer of the London Convention, that is, he promised the return of the Ottoman fleet and the evacuation of Syria in return for an assurance that he would be permitted to retain hereditary possession of Egypt.[117] The next stage in this development was the Straits Convention, signed in London in July 1841. The Porte was again a signatory to this convention, which sanctioned the ancient Ottoman rule that the Straits should remain closed to all non-Ottoman warships in time of peace. The agreement signified an important step in the development of European international law. By way of a compromise it created a new form of power balance in the East which proved an essential element of the Concert of Europe.[118]

Two parallel developments during this period highlighted Ottoman determination to comply with European standards. The first was the Anglo-Ottoman commercial treaty, concluded in August 1838, which introduced the principle of Free Trade in the Middle East.[199–121] As a result, the Ottoman Empire became, by the middle of the century, a principal trade partner of Great Britain.[122,123]

The second development affected Ottoman society on a completely different level, but surely as profoundly: The statesmen at the Porte had long realized the ideological significance of the abstract principle of civic equality. As they saw it, it was the inferior legal status of Ottoman non-Muslims that served European powers as a moral legitimation for their interventions in the East. Therefore, Western public opinion was not to be given the occasion to denounce Ottoman rule as discriminatory against its Christian subjects.[124,125] Such insights led to the formulation of the two major documents of the Ottoman reform period, the imperial rescripts of 1839 and 1856. An analysis of these rescripts reveals that the concern for the survival of the empire remained the determining factor.[126–128] It was hoped that the wind would be taken out of the sails of separatist tendencies, such as the Greek and Serbian independence movements, if the basic requirements of a formally emancipated civil society were met. Accordingly, legal equality for all subjects regardless of religious allegiance had top priority in the reform programme.[129–132]

Without adequate consideration of the issues delineated above, it is impossible to explain coherently why the Eastern Question reached a turning point in 1853. The Franco–Russian conflict over the Holy Places, intricately connected with the question of the legal status of Ottoman Christian subjects, did not merely provide 'the ostensible origins, though in no real sense the cause, of the Crimean War', as asserted by one specialist.[133] On the contrary, it can be argued that both Russia and France placed great importance on the rather symbolic privileges of their respective churches in the Near East. After all, if Russia had got her way in the question of the Holy Places, she would have consolidated her influence over

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the Greek Orthodox populations. It goes without saying, therefore, that for both Russia and the Ottoman government the crucial issue was whether the Tsar would be entitled to make representations at the Porte on behalf of the Ottoman Orthodox subjects or not; on that matter the Ottomans remained adamant and therefore risked the Crimean War.[134]

Britain and France's entry into the war was in response to different sets of interests. But there was also a common ground. By 1853, the Eastern Question had become a European concern, subject to the rules of the Concert of Europe. On the other hand, what Russia attempted (with the Menshikov mission to the Porte) in early 1853 aimed at effecting a return to the conditions of Küçük Kaynarca (1774). If the Western Powers had not reacted as they did, the progress achieved since 1815 towards more multilaterality in international law would have been sacrificed, apart from the loss of commercial, strategic and political assets and Great Power prestige in the East.

The objectives of Ottoman foreign policy during the Crimean War to be confirmed in the peace settlement were formulated by Âli Pasha at a meeting in Vienna on 19 April 1855 in the following manner:

> The Contracting Powers, wishing to demonstrate the importance they attach to assuring that the Ottoman Empire participate in the advantages of the concert established by public law among the different European States, declare that they henceforth consider that empire as an integral part of the concert and engage themselves to respect its territorial integrity and its independence as an essential condition of the general balance of power.[135]

As R. H. Davison has rightly pointed out, Article 7 of the Treaty of Paris of 1856, which addresses the same issue, did not meet all the desiderata formulated above – it left out the reference to the European balance of power. Of course, it was quite a success to achieve the membership in the Concert of Europe. However, Davison shows convincingly that it would have been much better to get a 'declaration that the Ottoman Empire was essential to the European balance of power', simply because only the balance 'was conceived … to be real, and to be operative' at the time. But among the rules on which the balance rested, there were two that would not harmonize well with the real state of the Ottoman Empire: 'that no power should be too much weakened relative to the others; and that if one power made important territorial gains others should be allowed compensatory gains.'[136] In other words, a declaration that the Ottoman Empire was essential to the European balance of power would have amounted to granting to this empire great power status with a recognized claim to compensatory gains. As a matter of fact, it took hardly two decades before the Powers intervened again in order to partition Ottoman territory by way of compensation.

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