



THE CONGRESS OF BERLIN (1878) IN CONTEXT OF THE OTTOMAN-GERMAN RELATIONS*

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the changing relationship between Sultan Abdulhamid II's Ottoman Empire and Bismarck's German Empire after the Congress of Berlin in 1878. This paper will first focus on Bismarck's policies towards the "Eastern Question" which was related with the Ottoman Empire and its territory. In order to do this Bismarck's system of alliances and his sensitive balances of power in Europe needs to be studied. Then it will look at Abdulhamid II's foreign policy especially his approach to Germany. Sultan's approach to Germany was major a shift for Ottoman foreign policy since up until then Ottoman Empire had been dealing with other major European powers, such as Great Britain and France. However, Sultan decided to establish close relationship with Germany. There were several reasons: Germany's different policies regarding to Balkans, Armenians, and financial situation of the Empire, close military relations with Germany as well as Abdulhamid's Pan-Islamism. Finally, the influence of the Congress of Berlin on the Ottoman-German relations will be elaborated.

Key Words

Congress of Berlin 1878, Ottoman-German Relations, Abdülhamid II, Bismarck, European Great Powers

OSMANLI-ALMAN İLİŞKİLERİ ÇERÇEVESİNDE BERLİN KONGRESİ (1878)

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile Bismarck Almanya'sının 1878 Berlin Kongresi sonrasındaki değişen ilişkilerini analiz etmektir. Öncelikle bu dönemde Avrupa'da Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve topraklarının geleceğini ifade eden "Şark Meselesi"nde Bismarck'ın politikası ile Avrupa'da kurduğu ittifaklar sistemi ve güçler arasındaki hassas denge incelenecektir. Ardından II. Abdülhamid'in dış politikası ve özellikle Almanya'ya yaklaşması mercek altına alınmaktadır. Padişahın Almanya'ya yönelimi Osmanlı dış politikasında o ana kadarki İngiltere ve Fransa gibi diğer Avrupa büyük güçleriyle ilişkilerinden sapma anlamına gelmektedir. Buna rağmen,

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Padiřah Almanya ile yakın iliřkilerin tesisine karar vermiřtir. Bu yeni ynelimin nedenleri arasında Almanya'nın Balkanlara, Ermeni sorununa, İmparatorluęun ekonomik durumuna, iki lke arasındaki sıkı askeri iliřkilere ve Abdlhamid'in İřlamlık siyasetine dnk farklı siyaseti yatmaktadır. Son olarak Berlin Kongresi'nin Osmanlı-Alman iliřkilerine etkisi ayrıntılı olarak incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

1878 Berlin Kongresi, Osmanlı-Alman İliřkileri, II. Abdlhamid, Bismarck, Avrupa Byk Gçleri



1. INTRODUCTION

The term '*sick man of Europe*' was used for the Ottoman Empire in Europe of nineteenth century describing the international problems presented by the chaotic condition of the Ottoman Empire when it was threatened by internal and external troublesome. The fourth Ottoman-Russian War in 1877-1878 was also called as the 'Eastern Crisis' in Europe which was the last major war waged in Europe before the First World War. After the war, the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin of 1878 signed. Treaties were meant the loss of vital territories in the Balkans and Caucasus for the Ottomans. In the summer of 1878, the European great powers forced Russia to modify the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano in order to protect their own interests in the context of the 'Eastern Question'. The destroying politics of Russia, England and France on the Ottoman state left Sultan Abdulhamid with no alternative but to seek the support of the emerging major power that did not have secret agenda on the Ottoman Empire: Germany. Abdulhamid II leant to Germany, because of both German's lack of political interest in the Ottoman territory compared to the other European great powers. Another reason is that German success in war of Franco-German War of 1870-1871 which indicated supremacy and efficiency of German army became a good model for the Ottoman leadership.

In contrast for Germany, before the Congress German Chancellor Bismarck had still been thinking to make cooperation with Russia and had made plans for the division of the Ottoman territory. But he changed his attitude towards the Ottoman Empire when the Congress in Berlin was held. After the Congress of Berlin he began to attribute greater significance to the continued existence of the Ottoman Empire. Despite the Ottoman government maintained their control over the Balkans for more than thirty five years as a result of the Treaty of Berlin, the Ottoman Empire was consequently dragged into fatal multiple problems such as the collapse of its economy and the foreign intervention to its reform policy.

2. GERMAN POLICY TOWARDS OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE CONGRESS OF BERLIN

The victories of Prussia over Austria (1866) and France (1871) had changed the balance among the European powers. After these wars and unification of Germany under Prussian leadership and its Chancellor Bismarck, The German foreign policy focused mainly on European issues for first several years. Thus, the center of power in central Europe shifted from Vienna to Berlin with the emergence of a strong German state. The initial



aim of Bismarck was to strengthen the young state in Europe. Hence, Germany could not focus on the issues of the Middle East and Balkans.¹

In consequence, after 1872, people in Europe experienced an era of peace thanks to Bismarck's foreign policy. During his rule, on the one hand, Bismarck tried to prevent the threat of a Franco-Russian alliance, and thus a two-front war. In addition, he put distance to expansionist nationalism and imperialist partitioning.² Therefore, the Germans did not pay as much attention as they should have to the Balkans and the Middle East.

Bismarck had no direct interest on the developments in the Balkans and opposed to any direct economic and political engagement with the Ottoman Empire. For example, just two years before the Congress of Berlin, Bismarck clearly stated his government's policy regarding to the Eastern Question: "I am opposed to the notion of any sort of active participation of Germany in these matters, so long as I can see no reason to suppose that German interests are involved, no interests on behalf of which it is worth our risking — excuse my plain speaking — the healthy bones of one of our Pomeranian musketeers."³ However the following decades witnessed how he made significant changes to the shaping of the history in this region.

Under Bismarck's leadership, the German policy towards the Ottoman Empire and its subjects would have exclusively led by the German interest which was based on the preservation of the European status quo and — if necessary have to be managed — at the expense of the subjects of the Balkans and the Middle East. Bismarck firmly tried to avoid an imperialist expansion of Germany. Moreover, he realized the difficult task of mediating in the Eastern Question among Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, Britain, and Italy, all of which pursued political and economic interests in the collapsing of Ottoman Empire. The Germany consistently opposed to involve the Ottoman government's reform attempts. Thus, it was clear that Bismarck was ready to buy the European peace through concessions over the Ottoman Empire. As a conclusion, Bismarck's strategy of the 1870s and 1880s was to divert the tensions between the great powers to the periphery. In order to achieve his goal, Bismarck encouraged the other major powers to acquire colonial possessions and protectorates the Ottoman territories in Africa or the Middle East. For instance, as early as 1876 Bismarck suggested that Brit-

¹ Wolfgang Justin Mommsen, „Ägypten und der Nahe Osten in der deutschen Außenpolitik 1870-1914“, Wolfgang Justin Mommsen (ed.), *Der autoritäre Nationalstaat, Verfassung, Gesellschaft und Kultur des deutschen Kaiserreiches*, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 140.

² Gordon A. Craig, *Geschichte Europas 1815-1980: Vom Wiener Kongreß bis zur Gegenwart*, München: Beck, 1983, p. 292.

³ The speech was on 5 December 1876. G. Rhode, „Berliner Kongreß und Südosteuropa“, W. Althammer und W. Gümpel (eds.), *Südosteuropa im Entwicklungsprozeß der Welt*, München 1979, s. 173; Emil Ludwig, *Bismarck: The Story of a Fighter*, Little, Brown, 1927, p. 511.



ain should take control of Egypt, while France should settle in Tunisia. He nevertheless had the intention to play off the major powers against each other in the periphery not in Europe.⁴

One of the reasons was that the German Empire came relatively late in the ranks of the imperialist powers. The Bismarck's transition to an active colonial policy in the mid-eighties of the nineteenth century was temporary. The officially cautious policy on the colonial possessions has been revised in the early nineties. The strategy of the diversion of tension at the periphery presumed that the German Reich held back in the overseas regions, and not acted as a competitor of other major powers. This course of colonial abstinence during the Chancellorship of Caprivi remained largely preserved.⁵

Bismarck tried to employ the Eastern Question in order to redirect would-be Russian and Austria-Hungary alliance in the Orient to a common approach. His aim was only to avoid a European war, even if that meant the giving territories of the Ottoman Empire to the European major powers. He did not care whether this partitioning of Ottoman Empire by the European major powers would be accepted or not by the nations and people of the Balkans. Europe was for him a geographical term not a moral one. The Ottoman Empire was not worth so much for the civilized major European states and fight among them.⁶

The main interest of Germany was not to shape the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire but to strengthen relations between Germany and her friendly nations and the European major powers. Therefore, Bismarck's hidden solution to save peace in Europe was to partition the Ottoman Empire. He was worried to lose Germany's allies and friends in a possible conflict.⁷

He would have nothing to oppose, if other countries would attack to the territories of Turkey. He also explained that the German Empire had no goals in the East. By the help of this strategy of conspicuous lack of interest, he reactivated the goal of Three Emperors' League (*Dreikaiserbkommen*), created when Bismarck negotiated an agreement between the monarchs of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia in 1873. Bismarck's diplomatic text, as in the Kissinger's mentioned of 15 June 1877, in which he declared that his view of Germany, "has nothing to do accumulating territories, but concern a total political situation in which all powers except France need us,

⁴ Mommsen, "Ägypten und der Nahe Osten in der deutschen Außenpolitik", p. 141-146.

⁵ Wolfgang Justin Mommsen, *Das Ringen um den nationalen Staat*, Frankfurt am Main 1993, p. 507.

⁶ Wolfgang Justin Mommsen (ed.), *Der europäische Imperialismus*, Göttingen 1979, pp. 269-274.

⁷ Bekir Sitki Baykal, "Bismarck'in Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nu Taksim Fikri" *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi*, 5 (1943), 3-12, pp. 9-10.



and are restrained as much as possible by their relationships each other from entering coalition against us".⁸

Furthermore, Bismarck stated that the ideal condition for making a balance in Europe could only be possible if Britain had interest in preserving the status quo and Britain and France were kept away from having a good relationship because of their differences on Egyptian question. Thus, the German Empire would take the role of a mediator within the European state system.⁹ As a mediator, he was certainly interested on public opinion of German and Ottoman Empires. For example, Bismarck invited Ali Efendi, who was owner of *Basiret* newspaper and provided funding for printing apparatus. *Basiret* was known as pro-German stance during the Franco-German war in 1870-1871. This was a kind of signaling the emergence of the Ottoman-German rapprochement which was to change the course of German imperial policies until WWI.¹⁰ Another example is a German newspaper. In the pre-war era, The German press, i.e. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, stated that Porte (Ottoman Government) took Germany into account regarding to find foreign support to get out of the crisis and the Sultan and the members of the government, in this regard, got in touch with the German ambassador in Istanbul Prince Reuss. The German press contributed to the improvement of Turkish-German relations by giving detailed coverage and analysis to pre and post war news about Turkey.¹¹

Given the disastrous defeat in the war against Russia, Ottoman Empire was forced in 1878 to conclude a truce which gave the Russian diplomacy a free hand regarding the future of the Balkans. Austria-Hungary and Great Britain did not accept the terms for shaping the circumstances in the Balkans by Russia. Under this condition, to settle the question of shaping the future of political order in the Balkans, Austrian Foreign Minister J. G. Andrassy proposed a conference of European powers. Bismarck was not sympathetic to the idea of a conference, because the risk was too great for the Germany to be caught in the dilemma between Austria-Hungary and Russia. In this dispute, Bismarck declared Germany's neutrality, but to mediate between Russia and Austria-Hungary. A conference was convened in Berlin on 13 July 1878 to revise the preliminary peace of San Stefano (Yeşilköy, a suburb

⁸ Heinrich August Winkler, *The long road west, 1789-1933*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2006, p. 230.

⁹ Johannes Lepsius, u. a. (eds.), *Die Große Politik der europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914. Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes*, Berlin 1923-1929, p. 275.

¹⁰ Onur İşçi, *Wartime propaganda and the legacies of defeat: The Russian and Ottoman popular presses in the War of 1877-1878*, Dissertation, University of Miami 2007, p. 27.

¹¹ Mustafa Gencer, „1877-78 Osmanlı- Rus Harbi'nde Alman Basını'na göre; Plevne'den Berlin Konferansı'na Osmanlı Devleti" 1. Uluslararası Plevne Kahramanı Gazi Osman Paşa ve Dönemi Sempozyumu. *Bildiriler*, Tokat 2004, 245-262, pp. 247-248, 260.



of Istanbul) between Russia and Turkey dated 3 March 1878 in favor of European powers' interests.¹²

After the Congress, Bismarck had played role of an 'honest broker' (*Ehrlicher Makler*) who will form a just balance between interests of the powers. The Ottoman Empire at the Congress played an insignificant role. They were not treated as an equal negotiating partner, but as a subject of political interests of major powers. Austria-Hungary and Britain favored a far-reaching restoration of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans because they wanted to prevent the growing power and influence of Russia and not because they were convinced of the viability of the Ottoman Empire. In the Congress, the new boundaries were drawn without regard to the national interests of the Balkan peoples, but solely by power politics of major powers.¹³

In Congress negotiations, Bismarck mistreated the Ottoman Delegation, which was composed of Alexander Karatodori (Carathéodory), an Ottoman Greek and secretary of the foreign ministry, Mehmet Ali, a general who was a German converted Muslim, and Sadullah Pasha, Turkish ambassador in Berlin. Bismarck warned that the aim of the Congress was to preserve the peace of Europe, and that he would not tolerate any views of "subjects of the Sultan". He told to Karatodori that since Turkey had signed the Treaty of San Stefano, it had no right to speak.

Bismarck dominated the Congress as a whole and controlled the whole discussions and decisions.¹⁴ The result was a compromise under the great powers, which affected the existence of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and severely lagged far behind the national expectations of Russian supported southern Slavs in the Balkans. The peace and balance of Europe was apparently restored at the expense of the Balkan nations and the Ottoman Empire. The political instability in the Balkans was thus inevitable. The Ottoman Empire fell completely under the control of major European powers. The full independence of Bulgaria was denied. It was promised autonomy, and guarantees were made against Turkish interference, but these were largely ignored. The province of Eastern Rumelia would remain under Turkish rule. Thessaly was ceded to Greece. Romania, Montenegro and Serbia were formally recognized as independent states. Austria-Hungary was granted the right to the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the

¹² Mommsen, *Der europäische Imperialismus*, pp. 275-278.

¹³ Rhode, „Berliner Kongreß und Südosteuropa“, p. 170.

¹⁴ Roderic H. Davison, „The Ottoman Empire and the Congress of Berlin“, Ralph Melville und, Hans-Jürgen Schröder (eds.), *Der Berliner Kongreß von 1878: die Politik der Großmächte und die Probleme der Modernisierung in Südosteuropa in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982, 205-223, p. 214; see also: Imanuel Geiss (ed.), *Der Berliner Kongreß 1878. Protokolle und Materialien*, Boppard am Rhein 1978, pp. XVIII-XIX.



Sanjak Yenipazar. The Turkish domination of the Christian population in the Balkans was the benefit of the great powers on the contrary of intended benefit of the peoples concerned. Russia received Bahçesaray in the Balkans and, Kars, Ardahan and Batum on the Black Sea. In the Straits, Sultan was sovereign to determine in case of war over whether and what should happen to the fleets passing through the Straits.¹⁵

The relative reluctance to imperialist ambitions was part of a policy which aimed at stabilizing the hegemonic position of the German Empire in Central Europe. From the standpoint of the peripheral view, German Reich had no real interest to the Middle East compared with other major powers. Germany usually made use of her influence to the benefit of maintaining the status quo in the region. This contributed later to the fact that the Ottoman Empire experienced collaboration with Germany in many ways more useful than those of other major powers. The greater penetration of the Tsarist Empire in the Ottoman Empire did not please the Austria-Hungary at all. Austria-Hungary felt that its economic interests were threatened in the Balkan Peninsula. The Pan-Slav provocation (expansion) of Russia in the Balkans put high pressure on the multiethnic Habsburg Empire. Bismarck made every effort to reconcile the two warring monarchies. He stressed that Germany did not raise any hegemonic claims to the eastern areas. Thus, it appeared that Bismarck had to play at the Berlin Congress (1878) the difficult task of the conciliator. The neutral approach of Bismarck in the Congress did not please the Russian side and Russians were suspicious on German attitudes and goals. In 1879 Berlin created a defensive alliance with Vienna-Budapest (*Zweibund*), which was expanded in 1882 by the accession of Italy to the Triple Alliance (*Dreibund*). Because both the conflict between Vienna and St. Petersburg as well as the tariff war between Berlin and St. Petersburg (1879) dismayed the balance in central Europe, as a consequence, Bismarck had to abandon the 'Pomeranian-grenadier-bones-thesis'.¹⁶

In line with his strategy of pushing both Great Britain and France out of the tensions at the center of Europe, Bismarck encouraged France to invade Tunisia and England to occupy Egypt. The British intervention in February 1882 was welcomed by Bismarck. The occupation of Egypt by Britain proved to be a great strategic advantage for the German foreign policy. Hence, German foreign policy played a key role for 25 years in this British-French rivalry and indirectly contributed to the isolation of France. The

¹⁵ Mommsen, „Ägypten und der Nahe Osten in der deutschen Außenpolitik“, pp. 280-281.

¹⁶ Armin Kössler, *Aktionsfeld Osmanisches Reich. Die Wirtschaftsinteressen des Deutschen Kaiserreiches in der Türkei, 1871-1908*, Phil. Diss. Freiburg/Br. 1978, New York 1981, pp. 101-102.



German policy was, in fact, to mislead France and Britain to differ on the Egyptian question. The Egyptian question was a proper method to compel Britain on matters of major policy concessions. Above all, Bismarck succeeded in forcing Britain to give the 1883/84 German colonial possessions in Africa and the Far East's endorsement through his playing of the Egyptian card.¹⁷

After 1885 the German attitude toward Britain was less tense. In connection with efforts to draw the British to the camp of the Central Powers in 1887, German diplomacy was seen willing to cooperate in matters of the Middle East. The Drummond-Wolf-Mission, which sought to legalize international law on the British domination in Egypt and the Suez Canal, was broadly supported by Bismarck. Bismarck concessions aimed to bring between Britain, Austria-Hungary and Italy, a Mediterranean Entente, which should halt the expansionist aspirations of Russia in the Balkans and prevent Russia in an active Eastern policy. These diplomatic moves were based on the premise that the German Empire pursued no interest of its own in the Middle East. Therefore, Bismarck reluctantly agreed to the deployment of the military mission in 1882 at Istanbul.¹⁸

Consequently, Germany advanced to the position of hegemony on the European continent. As a negative consequence for the empire, the League of Three Emperors had been broken. As a result of this new situation, pressure was put on the traditional Oriental policy of Germany. The policy of disinterest was no longer sufficient for the growing economic interests of the German Empire in the Middle East. A new policy was recognized the Central importance of the Eastern Question for the future of Germany Empire.

3. ABDULHAMİD II'S POLICY AFTER THE CONGRESS OF BERLIN

The Congress of Berlin was one of the major crossroads of internal and international development in Europe between the French Revolution and World War I. The Congress of Berlin emerged from the conflicts between the declining Ottoman Empire and the rising national movements in the Balkans. After the Congress, which revised the Ottoman-Russian agreement of San Stefano, Ottoman Empire lost important European provinces. The result was a large exodus of Muslims from the Balkans to Anatolia. This changed the population structure of the country. While at the beginning of the nineteenth century non-Muslim population of Empire accounted for

¹⁷ Mommsen, „Ägypten und der Nahe Osten in der deutschen Außenpolitik“, pp. 148-153.

¹⁸ Jehuda Lothar Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe, Die preußisch-deutschen Militärmissionen in der Türkei (1835-1919)*, Düsseldorf 1985, pp. 35-38.



about 40% of the whole population, it was now shrunk to 20%. The Ottoman government recognized that the *Tanzimat* strategy, provided certain rights and immunities for non-Muslim minorities, was no longer able to prevent the nationalist tendencies among the Christian groups.¹⁹

The map drawn in the Berlin brought a lot of problems which was, at the end, the speed of collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The condition of the Treaty pushed the Ottoman Empire look for new orientation and alliances and made major shift of its foreign policy. Abdulhamid II understood that the major powers would not attempt to keep integrity of the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, the great powers speed up the process of disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.²⁰ Indeed, after the Congress, foreign intervention on the economic and internal politics of the Ottoman Empire tremendously increased. There were several outcomes of the Congress. As one of the results of the Congress, Austria-Hungary Empire emerged as a new Balkan's power. Another result was desire of independence among the Balkan nations accelerated. Great Britain intensified its influence in the Near East. German interest on the Ottoman Empire grew.²¹

In foreign policy, Sultan Abdulhamid II developed a new strategy, by which he had some success. He had pursued a policy of neutrality and did not form a lasting alliance with any of the powers. He saw Great Britain and Russia as a dangerous rival for his Empire. Therefore, he tried to build a friendly and balanced relationship with them. By the help of his balance of power politics, he tried to diminish the influence of Great Britain in the Ottoman Empire. He set France against Great Britain as Bismarck did in Egypt and against Italy in North Africa, as they shared the same interest areas.

In the light of changing international balance system, Abdulhamid II attempted to vitalize the Empire sources. To secure the future of the Empire, he examined the relations of European states among themselves and compared the intentions of the individual states to each other and thus opted for the German Reich as the partner, which took no direct attacks against the Ottoman Empire into consideration. The Sultan hoped for the support of Germany against ambitions of Great Britain, Russia and France in the Ottoman territory, who pushed the Ottoman Empire to make reforms in Anatolia and forced German Empire away from the field of colonialism.²² Moreo-

¹⁹ Mustafa Gencer, *Imperialismus und die Orientalische Frage. Deutsch-türkische Beziehungen (1871-1908)*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2006, p. 72.

²⁰ Gül Tokay, „Ayastefanostan Berlin Antlaşmasına Doğu Sorunu (Mart-Temmuz 1878)“ *Çağdaş Türk Diplomasi-si: 200 Yıllık Süreç*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1999, 189-202, p. 201.

²¹ Cenk Reyhan, „Türk-Alman İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Arka Planı (1878-1914)“, *Bellefen* 254 (Nisan 2005), 217-166, pp. 225-6.

²² H. Bayram Soy, *Almanya'nın Osmanlı Devleti Üzerinde İngiltere ile Nüfuz Mücadelesi 1890-1914*, Ankara: Phönix, 2004, pp. 81-83.



ver, Sultan's preference of Germany was also a result of his domestic reform program. To furnish his country through comprehensive modernization of the military, finance, justice and education for the future, the Sultan had put forward an ambitious reform program in 1879. He asked for military and civilian advisers from Germany in order to make good use of the German proposals.²³ Germany, however, could — given its economic and political influence on the Ottoman Empire since the Congress of Berlin — play an active role for the significant changes in the Ottoman economy particularly in its Asian territory.²⁴

After the Treaty of Berlin, the Sultan had considered that the country should maintain its neutrality under all circumstances, and Europe governments were surprised by his inaction against the Bulgarian unrest when the province of Eastern Rumelia proclaimed the union with Bulgaria in 1885 following an uprising. He foresaw that a united Bulgaria under Alexander of Battenberg was something completely different than the great Slavic state. His Balkan policy was based on the notion of divide and rule, *divide et impera*, during the following two decades. He saw a chance for the Empire to survive in Europe only through the manipulation of opposite major powers of Europe by constant maneuvers and also the bloody conflicts between Serbs and Bulgarians, between Greeks and Albanians helped his policy. Another important aspect of this policy is to keep Russia and Austria in rivalry each other in the Balkans.²⁵

About the decisions taken in Berlin with regard to the Balkans, the Sultan expressed his anger over the respected statesmen who had divided the Balkan Peninsula, without knowing anything about their inhabitants or taking them into consideration. He further argued that the Greeks would refuse to be part of the Bulgarian state, Albanians would not accept live under the Montenegrin state, and the population in Bosnia would resist against the alleged Austria's Liberation Army.²⁶ As a result of the Congress' decision on the Balkans, Abdulhamid II benefited in order to prevent their possible unity against the Ottoman Empire. In this way Abdulhamid II succeeded to establish a local balance of power in the Balkans, and thus preserve the peace. The Balkan states (Greece, Serbia and Montenegro) tried to extend its borders at the expense of the Ottoman Empire and the other Balkan states.

²³ Friedrich Scherer, *Adler und Halbmond: Bismarck und der Orient 1878-1890*, Paderborn 2001, p. 81; see also: Stanford J. Shaw, „A Promise of Reform. Two Complimentary Documents“, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, (1973), pp. 359-365.

²⁴ Hugo Grothe, *Die asiatische Türkei und die deutschen Interessen*, Halle 1913, p. 41.

²⁵ Joan Haslip, *Der Sultan, das Leben Abdulhamids II.*, München 1968, pp. 201-202.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 158.



Ethnic groups and nations tried their voices to be heard in the Congress, the Armenians in particular articulated their complaints and wishes. Therefore, another negative consequence of the Treaty was the internationalization of the Armenian reform process and foreign intervention. It provoked the Armenians to seek self-determination.²⁷ With the help of European statesmen, the Armenians succeeded for the first time to enforce the Congress to mention about the Armenian minority in the Ottoman Empire: 'The forces have been authorized to monitor the reforms, which have been pledged by Porte to carry out in the provinces inhabited by Armenians'. This clause caused a big disappointment to Sultan since the Berlin Congress limited the rule of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. The Sultan, voiced in the context of the Armenian reform issue to the German ambassador in Istanbul, 'I prefer death to reforms that could lead to autonomy in Eastern Anatolia'.²⁸ The reason is that only the heartland of the Empire, Anatolia, remained firmly in Ottoman hands. Among all the signatories of the Berlin Treaty, only Great Britain was keen to ensure that the treaty would be executed fully. Other signatories to the Treaty of Berlin, such as Russia, Austria and France were initially satisfied with their shares, and Bismarck had declared that Germany would exert no pressure on the Ottoman Empire to enforce the implementation of the treaty terms.²⁹

In contrast to the Article 16 of San Stefano, the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the Article 61 of the Berlin Congress no longer referred to as *Armenia* and the supervision of appropriate reforms now transferred all the European powers. Despite the Treaty of Berlin bestowed the right for the major powers to involve on the implementation of reforms in six provinces (Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Mamuret-ul Aziz and Sivas), Bismarck declared, first, strict non-interference policy on the Armenian question. And then, in 1882, he shifted his non-interference strategy to support the Sultan to resist on the Armenian ambition of autonomy which backed by the Great Britain.³⁰ Thus, advantage of the good relations with Germany was to ignore the efforts of Russia and Great Britain in relation to the dangerous reform in eastern Anatolia and to guarantee to Ottoman government free hand in question of the formation an Armenian state.³¹

²⁷ Josef Matuz, *Das Osmanische Reich*, Darmstadt 1985, pp. 244-245.

²⁸ Mehmet Hocaoglu, *Abdülhamid Han ve Muhtıraları (Belgeler)*, İstanbul, 1989, pp. 175-176.

²⁹ Haslip, *Der Sultan, das Leben Abdulhamids II.*, pp. 167-169.

³⁰ Mustafa Gencer, „Die Armenische Frage im Kontext deutsch-osmanischer Beziehungen 1878-1915“, *Osmanismus, Nationalismus und der Kaukasus: Muslime und Christen, Türken und Armenier im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Fikret Adanır / Bernd Bonwetsch, Wiesbaden: Dr. Reichert Verlag, 2005, 183-202, p. 185.

³¹ Atilla Çetin/Ramazan Yıldız (eds.), *Sultan II. Abdülhamid Han: Devlet ve Memleket Görüşlerim*, İstanbul 1976, pp. 50-51.



Regarding the Armenian issue, one has to draw attention on the perfidious game that European powers (especially Britain and Russia) played the Armenian question as a leverage to set the Porte constantly under pressure. *Armenian Revolutionary Movement (Hinchak, Dashnaktsutyun)*, certainly, helped the partially to exacerbate the conflict with its nationalist-separatist tendencies, but this still represented only a fraction of the Armenian population. However, the Armenian notables in the capital, the high clergy, the Armenian petty bourgeoisie and especially the mass of the Armenian peasants in eastern Anatolia, did not seek a national state of their own.

Another aspect of the growing Ottoman- German relationship after 1878 was about the economical infrastructure and military aids. The French and British capital had a dominant position in the Ottoman Empire. When in 1881 the *Administration de la Dette Publique Ottomane* (briefly ADPO) had established, there were 40% of government bonds managed by in French, 30% in UK and only 4.7% in German hands. Only in the late 1880s, the German share rose, while the British share decreased. The Ottoman government turned to German banks for new government bonds. It was expected that German companies would be interested in industrial projects. As a result, the interest of the German public for investment in Ottoman Empire increased. A German consortium led by *Deutsche Bank* acquired the Anatolian Railway in 1888. One year later, Bismarck bought Egyptian government bonds at the value of 150,000 marks.³²

The Sultan was ready to give the Germans the contract for the construction of the Baghdad railway in order to curtail the dominant position of the *Banque Impériale Ottomane*, a French bank. On 15 August 1888, the German bank applied to the German government to get the permission and assistance in this important project. Bismarck was not willing to grant the assistance of the German government. The risks would be exclusively undertaken by the company. The Anatolian Railway project has proved a crucial first step by which the German Reich was immediately drawn into the complex web of informal financial imperialism, which had originated in the Ottoman Empire since the 1880s. For one hand, it appeared to be necessary for obtaining a license, a Turkish government bond on the German market, and secondly, the Anatolian Railway Company had at least been seen from outwards as a purely German company, which could inevitably lead to political complications. The German Bank cooperated with the ADPO for the financing of the company, which gave the approval to manage the financial guarantees and revenue sources. In this way, the credit worthiness of the

³² Mommsen, „Ägypten und der Nahe Osten in der deutschen Außenpolitik“, p. 152.



project has been enormously increased. Thus, the German high finance in the Ottoman Empire was fully incorporated into the semi-colonial system that developed since 1881.³³

Another area of cooperation between the Ottoman-German Empires was modernization and reforms of Ottoman army. The fatal course of Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878 had uncovered grave deficiencies in the Turkish army. The Porte had to make every possible effort to improve the performance of its armed forces. In order to avoid any further strong dependence on Great Britain and France, Abdulhamid II seemed to give preference for this task to Germany, owing her lack of political interest in the Orient compared to the other Great Powers. The German chancellor recommended to the Kaiser to comply with the Sultan's wishes. He expressed his opinion, that such a mission of German officers would provide the officers concerned with the opportunity to improve their military education and the German government would achieve growing means of influence on Turkey.³⁴

In 1880 Bismarck surprised his followers by dispatching civil and military advisors to Istanbul. For the first time, Germany actively intervened in the Eastern Question. This symbolized a change in the military reform policy of Turkey. While the reform was performed by converted immigrant officers before, The German military advisors started to lead the reform movements along with the strategies of General Staff of Germany and by German military technology until the World War I.³⁵ A few Prussian officers, namely Otto Kaehler, Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz, Louis Kamphövener, Hans von Hobe, came to Turkey with the official knowledge and consent of the Reich in the early 1880s to give assistance to the training and development of the Ottoman armed forces. The so-called Kaehler-Mission, arrived on 11 April 1882 to Istanbul, consequently widened and deepened the German-Turkish relations.³⁶

The pioneer of Germany's activities in the Ottoman military sphere was Freiherr Colmar von der Goltz (Goltz Pasha). He was sent as Prussian military advisors to Istanbul in 1882, and lead the German military mission until

³³ Ibid, pp. 153-156.

³⁴ Jehuda Lothar Wallach, "Bismarck and the 'Eastern Question'. A Re-Assessment", Jehuda Lothar Wallach (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East 1835-1939*, Tel Aviv 1975, 23-29, p. 26.

³⁵ Cenk Reyhan, "Türk-Alman İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Arkapları (1878-1914)", in: *Bellefen* LXIX (2005) Vol. 254, 217-266, p. 236; Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, "The German Middle Eastern Policy, 1871-1945" Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East 1871-1945*, Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2004, pp. 1-23; İliber Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu*, 9. Basım, İstanbul 2006, pp. 92-100.

³⁶ Ulrich Trümpener, "German Officers in the Ottoman Empire 1880-1918: Some Comments on their Backgrounds, Functions, and Accomplishments", Jehuda Lothar Wallach (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East 1835-1939*, Tel Aviv 1975, 30-43, pp. 32-33.



1895.³⁷ Even if the military missions of Kaehler and von der Goltz had not resulted in the desired strategic objectives, they mediated in the supply of arms. The reports of the Mission von der Goltz, however, draw a positive result. In his view, the Turkish people — like the Germans — were ‘people in arms’ (*Volk in Waffen*). The spirit of punctuality and order and the strict sense of duty had entered the Turkish army.³⁸

Although the military advisors and capitalists had greatly increased the German influence in the Ottoman Empire after 1878, they could not totally cut the long-standing Ottoman ties with Great Britain. The Ottoman government began its drift towards Germany only after Gladstone’s anti-Turkish speech in 1889. The course of Ottoman foreign policy began to shift, after 1880, from England towards Germany. A few days after William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898) delivered his speech in Manchester in 1889, the Sultan invited Kaiser Wilhelm to visit the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, The Sultan played his ‘pan-Islamic’ card and sought to forge stronger links with Germany. After the visit and Kaiser’s declaration of himself as being a “friend of the Muslims”, the Sultan asked the Ottoman diplomats in Europe to evaluate the international effects of his visit. The Germans had also studied the possible use of Islam in their foreign policy in the Middle East.³⁹

In summary, Germany under the leadership of Bismarck, made contribution with regard to the development of close tie with the Ottoman Empire, with the deployment of German officers as a consultant (to the Ottoman Empire 1880/82) and with the acquisition of the concession for the construction of the Anatolian Railway in 1888. Thus, it opened the way for the process of direct political involvement of Germany in the Eastern Question in the long term.⁴⁰ Bismarck's policy was designed to keep the peace in the center of the continent at the expense of the periphery, and consequently to

³⁷ The literatur on the development of Ottoman military reform policy and the involvement of German advisors in it is enormous: At the time, Goltz was a German officer advising the Ottoman army. He was a prolific writer, publishing numerous articles and book on the country. For a recent publication discussing his activities, see for instance: Handan Nezir Akmeşe, *The Birth of Modern Turkey. The Ottoman Military and the March to World War I*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2005; Malte Fuhrmann, „Zwei Völker in Waffen: Türkisch-deutsche Interdependenzen beim *nation building*“, Ulf Brunnbauer, Andreas Helmedach, and Stefan Troebst, (eds.), *Schnittstellen: Gesellschaft, Nation, Konflikt und Erinnerung in Südosteuropa*, Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007, 231-244; Feroze A. K. Yasamee, „Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz and the Rebirth of the Ottoman Empire“, *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 9, no. 2 (1998) 91-128; Hermann Teske, *Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz: Ein Kämpfer für den militärischen Fortschritt*, Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1957; Rifat Önsoy, *Türk-Alman İktisadi Münasebetleri (1871-1914)*, İstanbul 1982, pp. 96-102; Odile Moreau, „Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Askeri Misyonları“, *Osmanlı*, 2, Ankara (1999) 334-344; M. Epkenhans, „Military-Industrial Relations in Imperial Germany, 1870-1914“ *War in History*, (1 January 2003), vol. 10, no. 1, 1-26.

³⁸ Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe*, pp. 34-81.

³⁹ Kemal H. Karpat, *The politicization of Islam: reconstructing identity, state, faith and community in the late Ottoman state*, New York 2001, pp. 221-222. For convenient survey of Abdulhamids ‘pan-islamic’ policy, see Caesar E. Farah, *Abdulhamid II. and the Muslim world*, İstanbul: Foundation on Islamic History, Art and Culture, İstanbul 2008.

⁴⁰ Gregor Schöllgen, *Imperialismus und Gleichgewicht, Deutschland, England und die orientalische Frage 1871-1914*, München: R. Oldenbourg, 1984, p. 419.



find the German Empire in Europe a place as a 'developing' great power. Colonial acquisitions or spheres of influence in the era of imperialism were necessary in order to become a superpower. Developing close relations with the Ottoman Empire was one of his policies to make Germany a great power in international political system.

This means that the reasons of German involvement in the Ottoman Empire were stemmed from Europe, as Germany sought a position of power in Europe. With the change in German foreign policy, the Bismarckian policy of equilibrium has been abandoned. Only after achieving these objectives, the empire was faced with the challenge of satisfying a further condition for receiving the power position.⁴¹ The policy under the motto 'Place in the Sun' seemed to be the result of total isolation of the empire in Europe. The form of indirect influence and penetration of the Ottoman Empire (*pénétration pacifique*) was based on the specific situation of Germany since Germany had direct limited success in contrast to its rivalries early colonization. Great Britain and France had significant territories already in Asia and Africa. The German involvement in the Ottoman Empire should be viewed in this light.

The German presence in Anatolia had a double meaning: First, that collided with Russia's ambitions, namely the Russian expansion to the Ottoman territory. Germany's position in the long term as European power would have been jeopardized as a result of giving Istanbul to the Tsarist Empire.⁴² Second, it was a thorn in the eye with respect to India for the British interests. The German informal imperialism went into a politically unstable situation in which the interests of major powers and international financial capital crossed.⁴³

Also, the Ottoman side in turn benefited from Germany's activities in Anatolia. The Germans had been welcomed in the Ottoman Empire in its approach as a peaceful associate, unlike their rivals France, Great Britain and Russia. European power structure entered a new phase for the Ottoman Empire. The empire crumbled at the growing periphery of Europe. Russia was in Bulgaria and Armenia; Austria-Hungary had taken root in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The British were in Egypt and Cyprus. The traditional friend of France had occupied Tunisia, and began to penetrate Syria economically. Bulgaria and Greece fomented ethnic and religious conflicts in

⁴¹ Fikret Adanır, „Deutschland im Spiegel türkischer Geschichtsschreibung“, *Fremdheit und Angst, Beiträge zum Verhältnis zum Christentum und Islam*, K. Doron, Ş. Sargut, R. Wolf-Almanasreh, (eds.), Frankfurt 1988, 159-173, p. 165.

⁴² Rainer Lahme, *Deutsche Außenpolitik 1890-1894, Von der Gleichgewichtspolitik Bismarcks zur Allianzstrategie Caprivi's*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1990, p. 494.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 191.



Macedonia. These rivalries left less room to maneuver for Abdulhamid II. Through the skilful playing off the superpowers against each other allowed the Sultan to prevent further m his state. In the struggle for the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, he managed to intensify the conflicts between the European powers in the East, so that a breakdown was halted. One has to stress the fact that there was little alternative to the Abdulhamid's already brilliant 'policy of weakness'. He successfully did halt the break up of the Ottoman Empire and balanced the pressure of the imperialist powers.⁴⁴

With the beginning of the twentieth Century the flexibility of the international system was lost. The Ottoman Empire did not turned as colonized or semi-colonized territories, such as Africa and China. The Ottoman leadership under Abdulhamid always found a chance to lean on one of these great powers, which seemed less dangerous for the empire. Through the alliance's efforts in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Italy on one hand and Britain, France and Russia coming closer to each other, on the other hand, staying as a neutral state was becoming impossible. Therefore Abdulhamid II of 1890 had given up his foreign policy of neutrality and decided, after lengthy discussions with his officials, for a rapprochement with Germany.⁴⁵ However, Sultan stayed away from official alliances. For example, Sultan cautiously rejected the German Emperor Wilhelm's offer to enter the Triple Alliance. Indeed, the Sultan did not involve any official alliance due to that he didn't ostracize and depend on any single power.⁴⁶

Unlike other European countries, the German Reich had opted for the 'integrity of the Ottoman Empire'. The Sultan Abdulhamid II could see the beginnings of the German railway construction in Anatolia as a proof of German's friendly policy towards the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the policies of other powers tended to be for the complete disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The Sultan hoped the rapprochement with Germany would push away the influence of French financiers, while giving his country a railway system that would serve primarily to the strengthening and development of Turkey.⁴⁷

Germany wanted to expand its economic and military influence in the Ottoman Empire. German officers supported the Ottoman military. The military support was provided in two ways. The German government both sent military advisers to the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish officers were trained in Berlin, Potsdam and Vienna, such as Muhtar and Izzet Pasha. The

⁴⁴ Gencer, *Imperialismus und die Orientalische Frage*, pp. 123-124.

⁴⁵ Mim Kemal Öke, "Şark Meselesi" ve Abdülhamit'in Garp Politikaları (1876-1909)", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, III, İstanbul (1982), 247-275, p. 271.

⁴⁶ Orhan Koloğlu, *Avrupa Kiskacında Abdülhamid*, İstanbul: İletişim, 1998, p. 55.

⁴⁷ Gencer, *Imperialismus und die Orientalische Frage*, pp. 82-83.



German economic and diplomatic influence grew on Ottoman government. Germany supported the Pan-Islamic policy of the Sultan. As a sign of this support, Wilhelm II proclaimed spectacularly himself in his speech in 1898 on his trip to the Ottoman Empire as the guardian of the Ottoman Empire and of all Muslims. By means of this bold appearance of the Emperor of German diplomacy succeeded in gaining tangible business and strategic benefits.⁴⁸

4. CONCLUSION

The War of 1877-78 and The Berlin Treaty constituted the most important historical, cultural and psychological turning point in the Ottoman history in nineteenth century. For the first time Ottoman statesmen and public realized that the total collapse of the Empire was an imminent possibility.⁴⁹ The fundamental problems of the Ottoman government were emerging nationalisms and the Great Powers' relentless interventions. Eastern crisis gave the opportunity to evade the isolation Germany faced in Europe after German-Franco war in 1871. Bismarck thought that France could be left to a diplomatic isolation by making European powers to confront to each other. Bismarck knew that either Austria or Russia would turn against to Germany if Three Emperor Leagues was collapsed. Hence, he tried to negotiate a contract in Berlin Congress to have a restricted influence zones in Balkans for both countries.⁵⁰

The 'Pomeranian-grenadier-bones-thesis' presents Bismarck as absolutely indifferent to any political, economic and military ties with the Ottoman Empire. But this view based on a gross over-interpretation. However even Bismarck changed his attitude towards to Ottoman Empire from 1880 onwards, just as he did on the matter of overseas colonies, by switching to a policy of support for the Ottoman government.

There is no doubt that Bismarck considered German-Ottoman ties as vital against any possible future armed conflict with Russia. A stronger and growing Ottoman Empire could have been deployed in an emergency against Russia. (as in fact happened in the World War I), and a German Military Mission in Istanbul would not only advance this goal but also in-

⁴⁸ See Eric Jan Zürcher, *Turkey. A modern history*, New York 1994, p. 83; Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, „Paschas, Politiker und Paradigmen: Deutsche Politik im Nahen Orient 1871-1945“, *Comparativ*, Jg. 14, H. 1 (2004), 22-45, p. 23; Ulrike Freitag, „Schutzmacht aller Muslime? Zur Geschichte deutscher Orientpolitik“, *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, Heft 12/1995, 1461-1469.

⁴⁹ Kemal H. Karpat, *The politicization of Islam: reconstructing identity, state, faith and community in the late Ottoman state*, New York 2001, p. 153; Mahmut Muhtar, *Maziye bir Nazar. Berlin Antlaşması'ndan Birinci Dünya Savaşı'na kadar Avrupa ve Türkiye-Almanya İlişkileri*, Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1999, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Songül Çolak, „93 Harbi öncesi ve esnasında Alman İmparatorluğu-Osmanlı Devleti ilişkileri: Bismarck'ın politikası“, *1. Uluslararası Plevne Kahramanı Gazi Osman Paşa ve Dönemi Sempozyumu. Bildiriler*, Tokat 2004, 235-244, pp. 241-42.



strumentally foster and secure the interests of the German arms industry. The amount of time and energy allotted by Bismarck to German-Ottoman affairs by no means justifies his alleged complete disinterest in the 'Eastern Question'.⁵¹

Abdulhamid II had tried to earn German's friendship in order to protect Ottoman Empire from becoming a British dominion or breaking up several states. German-Ottoman friendship, however had turned into such a dependence that during the WWI it promised to turn the Ottoman Empire a 'German Egypt'.⁵²

Rather than delving into negotiations on the Congress, this paper first analyzes the German involvement into the Eastern Question before and after the Congress and how its policies changed from its indifferent position to an active policy to maintain *status quo* policy of keeping Ottoman Empire alive. Secondly this study explains the place of Germany on the foreign policy of Abdulhamid II when he was dealing with England, France and other European states. Finally, the effects of the Berlin Congress, with special reference to bilateral relations between the Ottoman and German Empires studied in this paper.

⁵¹ Jehuda Lothar Wallach, "Bismarck and the "Eastern Question". A Re-Assessment", Jehuda Lothar Wallach (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East 1835-1939*, Tel Aviv 1975, pp. 23-29, 28.

⁵² Engin Deniz Akarlı, *The Problems of External Pressures, Power Struggles, and Budgetary Deficits in Ottoman Politics Under Abdulhamids II (1876-1909): Origins and Solutions*, Princeton University PhD Dissertation 1976, p. 70.



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