



**Edict of the Rose Palace: First Steps of Modernization
of the Ottoman Empire**

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Abstract

The centuries-old history of the Ottoman Empire knows many stages of rise and fall. The constantly changing, dynamic reality, political context, and confrontation with ambitious rivals placed the country's rulers in front of the most difficult challenges. It was of key importance to care for renewal, to enter vitally important changes into domestic and foreign policy, and to implement well-thought-out and result-oriented reforms so that the empire's influence on current events in the world politics would not weaken and the Ottoman Empire would preserve a strong political entity. This circumstance became particularly relevant in the 19th century, when it became clearly evident that the leading European countries had easily adapted to the new social formation, capitalism, which replaced manufacturing industry with factories and plants, making it much more flexible and high-quality. In order for the Ottoman Empire not to lag behind the

general processes of the world politics, thinking about reformist ideas began as early as during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839), but the era of large-scaled modernization in the vast empire became associated with the name of Mahmud's successor, Sultan Abdulmejid I (1823-1861). The changes had an impact on the legislation, education, the military sphere, industry, the financial sector, railway communication, banking, the tax system, land ownership, the status of the harem, and the new residence of the Padishah. The goal of the reforms was to take into account the rich experience of developed European countries and adapt existing resources to the needs and characteristics of the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords: History of the Ottoman Empire, Sultan Mahmud II, Sultan Abdulmejid I, Modernization of the Ottoman Empire, Reforms, Valide Bezmialem Sultan.

Preamble

The target of this article is to demonstrate the causes, progress, and outcomes of the reforms which had been implemented in the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century. Furthermore, the essay provides interested readers and the scientific community with an in-depth look at numerous fundamentally important decisions made in the Ottoman Empire during this period, aimed at modernizing the country, shifting it onto qualitatively new tracks, and adopting the experiences of leading European states. The represented material is introductory and informative in its nature. It summarizes and logically connects the events and prospects existing within scientific circles regarding the aforementioned topic.

Methods

The article applies research methods which are established in scientific circles, specifically in Turkology and Ottoman studies. The thesis is based on diverse research methods, specifically on the aspects which are necessary for a deep and comprehensive study of the issue, such as: comparative analysis of materials, circular study of scientific literature, reconciliation of causal relationships between events, drawing conclusions, and generalization. The process of working on the article required conducting library research, familiarization with authoritative Turkish-language scientific literature, and translation them into Georgian. All this allowed us to clearly perceive all aspects of the research topic and to link it with the works of European scholars. Proceeding from this, the objective dynamics, course, and significance of the implementation of reforms in both the domestic and foreign policy of the Ottoman Empire were outlined and specified.

Discussion

Each century brought a new problem to the agenda, corresponding to the era and circumstances. The 18th and 19th centuries were no exception. According to scholars, the period of stagnation in the Ottoman Empire lasted for almost two centuries. It faced such a strong and ambitious political opponent as the Russian Empire. During this time, war broke out several times between the two empires, ending in negotiations and temporary truces, but the logical progression of events made it clear that the weakened Ottoman Empire was gradually losing its positions. (İnalçık H, 2020: 35-38) This was particularly evident in the Caucasus region, which the Ottoman Empire considered as its own property, but Russia sharply weakened its political opponent's influence and forced it to reconsider its ambitious plans. (Ortaylı İ, 2005: 50-53) This geopolitical trend had a painful impact on the fate of the Georgian kingdoms and principalities, which were abo-

lished as a result of Russia's purposeful and treacherous policy and were incorporated into the Russian Empire (Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti - 1801, Kingdom of Imereti - 1810). The Pashalik of Akhaltsikhe (also known as the Childir Vilayet, as it is referred to in Turkish-language scholarly literature) is worthy of special mention, as it had been an officially established Ottoman province on the territory of Georgia. (Karal E, 2011: 25-28) As a result of the Russia's aggressive policy, the Ottoman Empire also had lost the Childir Pashalik, which was fulfilling a strategically and financially important function. This was a political unit that allowed the Ottoman Empire to control the entire Caucasus region. (Seyitdanlıoğlu M, 1999: 45-46) Furthermore, the vassal kingdoms and principalities were also considered financially profitable allies. Despite the abolition of the Pashalik (1829), the noble Georgian house of Jakeli, which had been considered as the ruler of the vilayet for centuries, did not recognize Russia's prohibitions and continued diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire existing before. (Akyıldız A, 1998: 25-28) However, this relationship was of a formal nature. When discussing the reasons for the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, the Crimean War (1853-1856) should be highlighted separately, which historians also refer to as the Eastern War. This was a global military conflict in which, besides Russia and the Ottoman Empire, many other countries of the world participated; among them are the USA, Persia, a coalition consisting between Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire, etc. During this period, the Ottoman Empire was experiencing a political crisis. The course and the end of the Crimean War (1856) revealed many things. (Berkes N, 2002: 135-137) First and foremost, it became clear to the Ottoman side that it was necessary to conduct reforms in the country more rapidly and effectively, to put the empire on a different track, and to introduce sharp changes and modernization in all spheres of society. (Çadırcı M, 1991:

48-49) It should also be noted here that the issue of the necessity of modernizing the vast empire arose much earlier, at the turn of the 18th-19th centuries. In this regard, the 30th Padishah of the empire, Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839), particularly stands out. It was the Padishah who became the founder of the Tanzimat in the history of the Ottoman Empire. (Kütükoglu M, 1994: 25-28) This concept encompasses the reforms that had been implemented in the Ottoman Empire in the period since 1839 - till 1876. On top of all, the creation of a legislative document such as the first Ottoman constitution, or the "Gul-i Hane Hatt-i Sherif," became a turning point. (Tekeli İ & İlkin S, 1993: 58-60) The stated document outlined the basic principles, which later became the basis for the changes carried out. Turkologists name November 3, 1839, as the official date of commencing of the reforms. This is the day when Sultan Abdulmejid I (1839-1861), the son of Mahmud II and Valide Bezmialem Sultan (1807-1853), occupied the throne of the Ottoman Empire. He aimed to implement reforms not only in the military but also in the socio-economic spheres. (Mardin Ş, 1996: 189-191) According to historians, his decision was greatly influenced by his mother, a lady of Georgian origin who belonged to the noble Jakeli's family. Valide Bezmialem demonstrated a special interest in education, culture, and acute social problems. She managed to convince her son that the process of deep transformation of the country had to be multifaceted and fundamentally different, as all reforms previously carried out in the history of the Ottoman Empire were mainly limited to the military sphere. (Sakaoglu N, 2008: 91-103) Therefore, it was necessary for the reforms to encompass every structural link of the entire Ottoman Empire, especially since by the beginning of the 19th century, not only acute internal confrontations became evident, but also the ever-growing interest of European states in the Balkans and the Near East. (Gülsoy U, 2000: 86-91) The situation of the Ottoman

Empire was further aggravated by economic and political weakening, defeats suffered in various wars, public unrest, separatism, and an outdated management system, which created serious obstacles to the progress and development of the Ottoman Empire compared to European states. This circumstance became noticeable as early as during the reign of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807). (Uluçay M, 2011: 136-138) It is known that the Sultan's regent, or "Valide-i Naibe-i Saltanat," his mother, Valide Mihrişah (Dadiani) Sultan (1745-1805), was also a supporter of the immediate implementation of reforms; however, the full realization of the plan was hindered by the insubordination of the Janissaries, which escalated into a rebellion and ended with the assassination of the Padishah (Ortaylı İ, 1985: 187-188). Mahmud II's initiative also proved unsuccessful, as it was less aligned with the interests and needs of the general public (Kuran E, 1994: 45-48). In the first half of the 19th century, Europe found itself at a completely different stage of development as a result of the so-called Industrial Revolution. Leading countries were massively replacing manual labour with mechanized processes, which led to a decrease in the number of manufactories and the emergence of numerous factories and plants (Cezar M, 2002: 36-38). In this context, the stagnation of the Ottoman Empire became even more apparent, as it could no longer compete on the world market with much cheaper and higher-quality European products (Findley C, 2011: 201-204). Scholars divide the reforms carried out regarding the modernization of the Ottoman Empire into two stages: the first period covers the years 1839-1853, while the second begins after the Crimean War (1856) and ends in 1876. As already mentioned, at the end of 1839, Sultan Abdulmejid I published the "Gülhane Hatt-ı Şerif," which can be translated as "The Edict of the Rose Chamber" (Karpat K, 2002: 154-157). It became a turning point for the multifaceted and fundamentally important changes implemen-

ted in the country. The reforms aimed at three main goals: they were to ensure the life, honour, and private property of the empire's subjects, regardless of their religious affiliation (Somel S, 2010: 75-78). The focus should have been on the correct distribution of taxes and the reduction of the duration of state military service. From the very beginning, a certain part of society looked at the idea of reforms sceptically; this was especially true for state officials who abused their high positions and accumulated vast wealth through bribery (Akyıldız A, 2004: 98-103). In connection with this topic, it must also be noted that corruption had reached unprecedented scales, extending beyond the ruling circles and even taking root in the harem. According to scholars, one of the important figures in these processes was the first wife of Sultan Abdul-Mejid, Haseki Shevkeza Sultan (1820-1889), who was originally from Abkhazia and belonged to the noble Ancha-badze's family (Ortaylı İ, 1980: 127-129). The activity of the reactionary wing hindered the process of implementing the reform. Much time and effort were required to implement individual changes, which prevented the Padishah from acting consistently and productively. A necessary condition for the successful implementation of the reform was the unity of the government and the people (Shaw S & Shaw E, 2010: 38-40). The stated, in turn, put a new ideology for the empire on the agenda, which would prove acceptable to the peoples of the vast country. Ottomanism was declared as such an ideological basis, for which declarative internationalism was an essential characteristic aspect. However, it should also be noted that over time, it was Ottomanism that gave rise to the so-called "New Turks," who established the idea of the world's domination (Lewis B, 1970: 98-103). We must once again address to the Crimean War, which had a certain influence on the course of the reforming process. First and foremost, we must underscore the role of the Great Britain and France in terms of dev-

eloping of the conditions of the Treaty of Paris (1856). Emphasis should be made on the clear aspiration of these two states to weaken the Russian Empire and to strengthen their privileges within the territory of the Ottoman Empire. It was precisely as a result of their influence that the document dated by 1856 became the "Hatt-i Humayun" (Uluçay M, 1971:110-115). According to this legislative initiative, the state declared the use of the European experience and capital as the path to economic development. In reality, it appeared that the Ottoman Empire was creating privileged conditions for foreign capital. For example, foreign merchants were authorized to acquire real estate within the territory of the Ottoman Empire and benefit from the same conditions as the state's citizens (Koloğlu O, 2005: 23-25). The French side also ensured that this point was included in the Treaty of Paris (1856), turning it into an obligation of international significance for the Ottoman Empire. If evaluated objectively, it becomes clear that on the path toward modernization, the Sultan's court had to make decisions which had not been particularly advantageous, and they remained incomprehensible to the opponents of the Tanzimat and became a cause for sharp confrontations (Zürcher E, 2003: 76-78). Furthermore, such disadvantageous moves contradicted the objectives of the reforms and, instead of fostering development, turned the country into an even more weakened state being dependent on its European allies. Despite of inconsistent steps, Sultan Abdülmejid did not abandon the path of change. Evidence of this is the highly significant law dating back to 1858, which concerns land ownership (Behar C, 1996: 80-82).

Previously, the vast majority of the land in the state was considered the property of the empire. This meant that it was possible to lease it and generate profit, but selling or gifting it was prohibited. Considering the historical context, several types of land were distinguished in the territory of the Ottoman Empire in this regard: Miri

– this was state-owned territory; Mülk – estates of feudal lords; Waqf – lands whose income was used for the needs of religious and public charity (Engin V, 1993: 135-138). The Land Code of 1858 was characterized by its conservative nature, as it prohibited the owner from using the owned land for any purpose. Even the planting of a garden was restricted without special permission; however, it became possible to transfer land for free or sell it as a result of an agreement with state authorities (Yerasimos S, 1977: 145-147).

The law on vilayets adopted in 1864 became an important step for the Padishah, by which the principles of dividing of the empire into administrative-territorial units were revised (Bakar B, 2009: 124-126). For the purpose of modernizing the country, it became necessary to introduce technological processes, which primarily implied the creation of a railway network and the laying of tracks across a vast territory (Genç M, 2000: 51-53). It should be noted that the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire was also evident in this regard, as tracks already existed in Europe as early as the 15th century, although horses were also used for transportation. From the 1820s, railway communication spread widely in the leading European states, which particularly contributed to the development of the economy (Ahmad F, 1995: 78-80). In the Ottoman Empire, the problem of the necessity of the railway emerged only in the 1860s, and a state commission was created to solve it (1866), which considered various railway construction projects. Ultimately, thousands of kilometers of roads were laid and hundreds of bridges were built in the Ottoman Empire. It is also noteworthy that European capital and experience played a major role in the implementation of these grandiose projects. Several French companies were actively involved in this process, which ensured the rapid and high-quality implementation of the most difficult projects (Yıldız G, 2009: 148-150). The issues related to the country's budget

and tax system acquired fundamentally important significance. For the authors of the reformation ideas, the process of improving of the mechanism for accounting and controlling taxes became crucially important, which was particularly complicated by the frivolous and irresponsible attitude of some provinces toward taxes. They refused to pay the called “salghiri”, which sharply weakened the process of mobilizing budgetary resources (Kocatürk U, 1982: 30-33).

Taxpayers made all efforts to avoid financial obligations, and due to the stated the reformers' intent to improve the revenue system ended in failure. Despite of this, nothing could stop the development of historical patterns, as evidenced by the decision made in the 60s regarding the regulation of guilds, which clearly indicated that the Ottoman Empire was transitioning from a feudal state onto the tracks of capitalism (Pala İ, 2010: 43-46).

As it was mentioned above, the reforms carried out in the 19th century were distinguished by their scale and complicated nature. Prior to Sultan Abdul-Mejid, all rulers made all efforts to focus primarily on the transformation of the military system (Afyoncu E, 2005: 89-92). Historical reality revealed that such an approach was incorrect, as it was leading the empire to another extreme and granted military personnel a crucial mission and rights. This circumstance, in some manner, complicated the management of the Sipahis and their subordination to the state structures. The tragic end of Sultan Selim III (1807) also testifies to this – he was killed precisely by an attack of the rebellious Janissaries (Öztuna Y, 1986: 40-43). As for the military reform carried out by Abdul-Mejid, it aimed to create a regular and modernized army. For example, military conscription became mandatory not only for Muslims but also for followers of other religions living in the empire (Kunt M, 1988: 96-98). Mandatory service in the army was reduced from 15 years to 5-7 years. The Padishah also took

care of the visual aspect of the army to make the military uniform more modern, practical, and refined. The reform allowed the non-Muslim population not only to serve but also to strive for career advancement and to receive high ranks, which was linked to new hierarchical levels organized similarly to the European military system (1869) (Beldiceanu N, 1985: 75-78). However, the existence of a strong army necessarily required a corresponding foundation in the form of a stable, developed economy. Coins were in circulation in the country, which created many difficulties and inconveniences for the trade process (Georgeon F, 2006: 35-36). In order to make commercial activities more flexible, convenient, and productive, Sultan Abdul-Mejid ordered the printing of the first paper money, which was followed by the appearance of Ottoman banknotes in 1840 and their inclusion in international circulation.

During the same period, the implementation of significant financial reforms began, and were led by the Ministry of Finance (Hanioğlu M, 2006: pp. 235-237). It applied the France's rich experience and introduced innovations. For example, a joint-stock company and a stock exchange were established; the refinancing interest rate was determined, and the empire's budget was published. The medieval model of the economy was rejected and abolished. Manufactories and artisan guilds were replaced by factories and plants. In order to reduce the level of corruption and to make this process manageable, officials and public servants were officially exempted from taxes (Gül M, 2013: 189-191). The Ottoman Empire also focused its attention on professional banking operations and deepening of international relations, as evidenced by its business relations with European financial organizations. It is well-known that in the year of 1855, the government of the Ottoman Empire, under the leadership of Sultan Abdulmejid, took a significant loan from the Great Britain, which indicates that for Euro-

pean financial organizations, the Ottoman Empire was a reliable partner and an accepted entity in international commercial structures (Batur A, 1999: 63-65). Financial reform logically required the refinement and reorganization of the banking system, as it became necessary for the Ottoman Empire to connect with European structures financially as well. This was precisely the goal of the state banks, among which "Bank-ı Dersaadet" is particularly noteworthy, as it provided banking operations of international importance. Proceeding from this, the Padishah made all efforts to eliminate the prevailing corruption in the empire, which was devastating the country's economy (Turan Ş, 1990: 198-201).

The modernization process was inconceivable without a deep transformation of education and culture, as for centuries the empire remained a state where special attention was paid to the dissemination and teaching of religious knowledge. The 19th century became a period of great scientific discoveries and achievements, which clearly demonstrated that the empire should not fall behind the times and should care for the development of various sciences (Sunay S, 2007: 21-23). As it was mentioned above, prior to the education reform, priority in the Ottoman Empire was assigned to education of religious content. The madrasa and the mosque served to this purpose. Additionally, there was also a palace school where representatives of the country's elite studied. They were brought up primarily according to Islamic traditions and were equipped with the skills necessary for state officials (i.e., pashas and aghas). The madrasa was intended only for the Muslim population. For Christians, a closed-type boarding school was provided, for which up to 3,000 boys, aged between 8 and 20 years, were specially selected annually across the entire empire (Brummett P, 2013: 201-205). By 1861, there had been already 571 primary and 94 secondary schools for Christians in the Ottoman Empire.

From the 1860s, new educational institutions were established annually, and they were intended for primary, secondary, and higher education. Within the framework of the large-scale reform, it became necessary to create the Ministry of Education, which managed and controlled the educational process, once again emphasizing the fact that the field of education did not remain the sole prerogative of the clergy, and the highest structures of the state also participated in it (Pamuk Ş, 2005: 146-148). A significant step was the law adopted in 1869, which introduced 4-year universal compulsory education in Ottoman schools.

When speaking about the development of the educational sector, we cannot overlook the Padishah's Georgian mother, Valide Bezmialem (Jakheli) Sultan, who devoted the enormous financial resources accumulated over the years to the construction of new schools and hospitals (Güran T, 1998: 235-237). She also took care of establishing libraries, acquiring necessary books and unique manuscripts to further enrich the library funds. In the new schools, attention was paid to the quality of teaching and a proper material-technical base, which is why these schools were also referred to as the first Turkish colleges. The medical university founded in 1845 is also associated with the name of Bezmialem Sultan, which still enjoys great authority in the world today (Umar B, 1984: 336-338). The education reform also brought the in-depth study of various scientific fields to the agenda, which was followed by the establishment of schools with distinct economic and political profiles, an increase in the number of secular educational institutions, and the creation of the Academy of Sciences (1851). For the first time in the history of the Ottoman Empire, a group of students was specially selected and sent to various foreign universities to receive a qualified education (Cezar Y, 1986: 58-60).

Sultan Abdul-Mejid constantly tried to make decisions of progressive significance and expressed an attitude toward the principles of humanism. This is evidenced by the Religious Edict of 1856, which recognized the equality of the Muslim and non-Muslim populations. The official prohibition of torture and cruel treatment of people can also be considered a great manifestation of humanism (Deringil S, 2002: 35-38). The reform also partially touched upon the increase of women's rights, which primarily included the marriage age, which was set at 17 years instead of 14. When talking about steps taken toward humanism, the partial restriction of the slave trade also acquires fundamental importance, which categorically prohibited the trafficking of people of colour (Koloğlu O, 1998: 156-158). It would not be superfluous to recall that for centuries, the Istanbul slave market was considered as the most famous point in the Eastern world, into which people of various nationalities, races, religions, genders, and ages flowed in a continuous stream from all corners of the world. This decision once again emphasizes the Ottoman Empire's aspiration toward modernization, which naturally required caring for its international image. We are also convinced of this by the support shown by the Empire toward the Irish people in 1845-1849. The fact is that during this period, Ireland was engulfed by an economic crisis that the government was unable to solve, which caused a universal famine, resulting in the death of up to a million people and the emigration of a significant part of society. During this most difficult period for Ireland, the Ottoman Empire expressed its goodwill, which was consisting of the allocation of bread and financial resources for its population (Akarlı E, 1978: 189-191).

Striving for the modernization of the empire was once again manifested in Abdulmejid I's desire to move the main residence of the Ottoman Sultans to the European part of Istanbul. For this purpose,

the construction of a new palace began, which lasted since 1842 - till 1853. The Palace was given the poetic name "Dolmabahçe," which is translated as the "Rose Garden" and clearly illustrates the Abdulmejid's intention to build a modern, sophisticated, Baroque-style, luxurious building that was in no way inferior to the famous royal residences of European countries, unlike Topkapi Palace, which was located in the historical center of the capital city and embodied the country's past (Çelik Z, 1996: 148-150). To realize this vision, the Padishah spared no expense, that was also reflected in the impressive costs incurred for the construction. It is well-known that the Palace is distinguished by luxury and pomposity, and all this required more than 5 million gold pounds (Şeni N, 1999: 256-258). There is also a noteworthy fact that the Palace is adorned with a gift from the Queen of England, Victoria (1819-1901), a precious chandelier made of Bohemian glass, which weighs 5 tons. Dolmabahçe is also unique for its hosting of painting masterpieces by great artists, for the purchase of which the Padishah spent a substantial amount of money (Quataert D, 2005: 56-58). This rare specimen of architectural art was created by the architects of the Sultan's court, members of the Valian family, who appeared as the authors of numerous residences and mosques throughout the Ottoman territory. In Dolmabahçe Palace, besides the Padishah, his children, his first and second wives, and the Sultan's unmarried sister had the right to live (Önsoy R, 1988: 256-257). Changes also affected the harem, in which the Padishah's legal wives and concubines had traditionally lived for centuries. First of all, the status of Haseki was abolished, which was replaced by a new titling, "Chief Lady" (Ottoman: Bash Kadın-Efendi). The change did not affect the institution of the Valide Sultan.

The Padishah's mother remained a person distinguished by numerous privileges, but instead of the harem (Ottoman: Harem-i Hum-

ayun), she moved to a palace designated for her near the residence (Kunt M & Akşin S, 1989: 198-201). The Sultan had long-term goals regarding the transformation of the harem, as the history of the Ottoman Empire well remembers numerous intrigues originating in the harem, which later escalated into serious conflicts and ended in tragedies. For example, it is sufficient to recall the events of the 17th century, when two influential Valide Sultans confronted each other: Valide Turhan Hatice (1627-1683) and Valide Mahpeyker Kösem (1590-1651). The very fact that two such ambitious individuals lived in the same palace during the same period created a great threat of political intrigue and conflict. This view is reinforced by the tragic finale of the development of events – the attack on Kösem Sultan, which ended in murder (the night of September 1, 1651). By redistributing the inhabitants of the harem, the Sultan Abdulmejid I avoided the mutually damaging confrontations between the mothers of potential heirs to the throne, when he strictly defined not only the rights and duties but also the place of residence for the ladies close to the imperial court, namely the "Bash Kadins" (Geo. "Chief Ladies").

When we speak about the 19th-century Ottoman Empire and its modernization process, we must certainly highlight the exceptional efforts of the Sultan Abdulmejid I; however, researchers of this era note that the Padishah, suffering from tuberculosis, who, despite the severe illness, did not give up his harmful habits and did not change his lifestyle, lost interest in governing the state in the final years of his life and mostly sought seclusion in the palace. The Padishah died from the then-incurable disease on June 26, 1861, and is buried in the Selim Mosque (Kayalı H, 1998: 60-63).

Results

As a significant result of the represented essay can be considered the fact that it demonstrates in depth the large-scale and long-

term transformation process aimed at putting the development of the Ottoman Empire on modern tracks; through the comparison and analysis of facts, it argumentatively substantiates that conditioned implementation of reforms in the 19th-century Ottoman Empire; the way how the process of changes unfolded in all spheres of the country's social life; the positive and negative aspects of the implementation of reformist ideas in both the domestic and foreign policy of the country are highlighted.

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