



### From the History of Diplomatic Relations between Pope Pius II and Mehmed II – “Epistola ad Mahometum” (1461)

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#### **Abstract**

The history of Papal diplomatic engagements with the Ottoman Empire, particularly the efforts of Pope Pius II (born Enea Silvio Piccolomini, (1405-1464) to form anti-Ottoman coalitions and to reclaim Constantinople for the Christian world, is not unfamiliar in Georgian historiography. We possess studies by historians such as I. Khubashvili, M. Makharadze, D. Paichadze, and B. Kvachadze. However, there is still ongoing debate about whether there was a real correspondence between the Pope and Sultan Mehmed II (1444-1446)/(1451-1481) in 1461. There are different opinions among scholars regarding this issue.

Pius II, known in history as the "Diplomat Pope," distinguished himself with efforts to form anti-Ottoman coalitions and to reclaim Constantinople from Ottoman control. Within a year of his papal consecration in 1459, he convened a congress of European rulers in the city of Mantua (Northern Italy) to lay the foundations for a crusade against the Ottomans. This attempt by the Pope ended in failure because the European states, weakened by the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), were not able to unite against the then formidable Ottoman army. Since Pius's carefully planned anti-Ottoman campaign

did not materialize and all hopes were lost, the last of his diplomatic efforts was to send a letter to Sultan Mehmed II, which we will examine in this work.

My interest in this topic was sparked by the introduction of new European and Middle Eastern sources, which, after analysis, I believe, will allow me to draw certain conclusions regarding the Papal Letter of 1461.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Empire in the 15<sup>th</sup> century; Pope Pius II; Papal relations with the Ottoman Empire; Sultan Mehmed II; Letter of Pius II.

### **Methodology**

The previous article critically analyzed the diplomatic relations between Pope Pius II and Sultan Mehmed II of the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century. The work focuses primarily on the letter from 1461, – *Epistola ad Mahumetem*, – which was authored by the Pope and addressed to the Sultan.

### **Discussion**

In the 14th and 15th centuries, under the directive of the Roman Popes, active efforts were underway to form anti-Ottoman coalitions and to organize united Christian armies against the Ottomans. The capture of Constantinople in 1453 marked the end of Byzantium and the rise of a powerful Ottoman Empire, which firmly established itself on the European continent and posed a threat to the Near East and Christian states, particularly the Catholic world. As historian Norman Housley conveys, the fall of Constantinople was as traumatic for the European countries as the fall of Acre in 1291 and the loss of the Crusader states in the Holy Land (Housley, 1992: 99; Kvachadze, 2019: 404). From this point on, the foreign policy of the Roman Popes took on a new direction with *Res Orientalis*, – the Eastern Question, around which Europe united.

Even before the fall of Constantinople, the Ottomans' successful expansionist policy in the Balkans and Eastern Europe alarmed Europe. The Popes called for the creation of anti-Ottoman European united forces. In decisive battles near Kosovo in 1389, at Nicopolis in 1396, and at Varna in 1444, the Christian forces were defeated. The Byzantine Empire fell into the hands of the Ottoman domains. At the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439); (1443-1445), which was also attended by a Georgian delegation, the Byzantine Emperor John VIII (1425-1448) and the Patriarch of Constantinople Joseph II (1416-1439) signed the Union with the hope that the Latin-Christian world would offer them armed support against the Ottomans and they recognized the Pope's primacy. The Emperor's brother Constantine also attended the council, who would later become Emperor Constantine XI (1449-1453). Pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447), among other pressing matters of the day, also set forth the idea of forming an anti-Ottoman coalition and proclaimed a Crusade against the Ottoman Empire. However, this idea did not come to fruition, and on May 29, 1453, with the fall of Byzantium, Europe was faced with a dire reality. After the capture of Constantinople, the Popes primarily called upon European monarchs to join anti-Ottoman coalitions in the desire to reclaim the city for the Christian world, but to no avail. Pope Nicholas V (born Tommaso Parentucelli, (1447-1455) responded quickly and decided to recapture the newly conquered city for Christendom. On September 30, 1453, he declared a Crusade against the Ottomans (Khubashvili, 2004; 128). Silvio Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II and then Bishop of Siena, wrote to Nicholas V: "To the shame of the poor Christian world, I no longer wish to live; now we see one of the two lungs of Christianity has collapsed. We are the mourners of the fallen Empire of the East (Rome); now that Mohammed reigns within us, the Turks are upon us... The only recourse for us now is to organize a great Crusade, to recover Constantinople" (Setton, 1997:162). Pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447) was instrumental in promoting the idea of an anti-Ottoman

coalition alongside other significant matters of his day, calling for a Crusade against the Ottomans. Yet, this initiative was not sustained, and with the fall of Byzantium on May 29, 1453, Europe faced a grave reality. Following the capture of Constantinople, the Popes, primarily motivated by a desire to reclaim the city's Christian heritage, unsuccessfully urged European monarchs to join anti-Ottoman coalitions. After the death of Eugenius IV, Pope Callixtus III (1455-1458) ascended to the Holy See and was largely preoccupied with anti-Ottoman policies. In 1455, he issued a papal bull and sent his legates throughout Europe (Khubashvili, 2004:129), and envoys were dispatched to Persia and Georgia in 1456. The planned Crusade, launched by sea and land in 1456, did not materialize (Khubashvili, 2004:129). As I have noted, Western European states were reluctant to engage in large-scale campaigns against the Ottomans, as they were economically, agrarianly, and militarily weakened by the Hundred Years' War, particularly the Kingdom of France, which preferred negotiations and alliances with the Sultan, a strategy that would prove successful later in 1536.

Primarily, it was Albania, Wallachia, and Hungary that were on the forefront against the

Ottoman advances. Particularly aggressive Ottoman expansions were taking place on Hungarian territories. The Hungarian regent-governor John Hunyadi (1406-1456) achieved a significant victory against the Ottomans in 1456 at the Siege of Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade), delaying the Ottoman capture of Belgrade's fortress by half a century (Babinger, 1978:139., Alasania, 2014:178).

Pope Callixtus III passed away in 1458, and on August 19 of the same year, the humanist and scholar Pius II (born Enea Silvio Piccolomini, 1458-1464) ascended to the Papal throne, later known in history as "the Diplomat Pope." Pius II was one of the most outspoken crusading Popes of all time. Even before his elevation to the Church's highest office, he enthusiastically supported the Crusading forces

against the Ottomans and authored works on the subject (Bisaha, 2002; 183). Pius II inherited from Callixtus III a fleet of 16 galleys and 115,000 (some sources say 150,000) ducats to be used in the campaign against the Ottomans (Paichadze, 1989: 58., Makharadze, 2005: 32-33). Like his predecessor, Pius II prioritized the formation of an anti-Ottoman coalition on his daily agenda. However, European countries did not seriously consider the creation of a new united army to confront the Ottomans. Pius II, “among the most committed of crusading Popes,” convened a Congress of European rulers on June 1, 1459, in the city of Mantua (Northern Italy, Lombardy region), to establish an army that would uplift the Cross and challenge the Ottoman half-moon. The Pope arrived in Mantua on May 27, 1460, and opened the Congress (Makharadze, 2005:33). There he addressed the assembled: “Princes, who among you will become the leader of this holy war, to restore Christianity in the East, let him stand up!” (Alasania, 2014: 179). No one responded to his call, to which the Pope replied: “Then all of you are cowards! In that case, I myself will take the lead in the Crusade: I will hold the holy banner in one hand and the Cross of Christ in the other, and I will lead the legions forward. If my frailty does not mar victory, my blood will at least appease God’s wrath against the armies” (Histoire des Papes, 1842:254., Khubashvili, 2004: 134., Alasania, 2014: 180). Pius II’s plans met with failure at the Congress of Mantua. Before leaving Mantua (January 19, 1460), he published the bull – *Execrabilis* – which condemned all appeals made to the Congress, declaring the process canonically contemptible (Setton, 1997:214). Johann Wilhelm Zinkeisen in his monograph presents us with a report translated from Latin to Turkish by Gobelinus Persona, which Pius had presented during the Congress of Mantua: “We have called upon European monarchs and people to exchange ideas and understand the goals of Christianity. We came here full of hope. But we have seen with sorrow how empty these hopes were. We are ashamed that Christians are so faint-hearted; some

are joyful, some are disgusted. Turks are ready to die for their faith which should be condemned; we, on the other hand, cannot bear the slightest expense or insignificant effort for Jesus and the Holy Gospel. If we continue like this, woe unto us; if we do not change, we will soon be destroyed. May God change the mind of Christian kings and enlighten the hearts of the faithful, so that they finally take up arms and seek revenge for the dishonour Turks bring upon our religion every day" (Zinkeisen, 2011:185).

When Pope Pius II unsuccessfully summoned European monarchs to Mantua for a Crusade to the East, Mehmed II was preoccupied with subduing the entirety of Serbia, particularly with the capture of the well-fortified fortress of Smederevo. By the end of 1459, Smederevo, along with all of Serbia, had fallen into Ottoman hands (Tansel, 2014). Pius II placed great hopes on Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III (1452-1493) and the rulers of the East: the last Emperor of Trebizond, David IV Komnenos (1459-1461), King George VIII of Georgia (1446-1466; King of Kakheti - 1466-1476), and Uzun Hassan of the White Sheep Turkmens (1453-1478). Aware of Pius II's strong desire to include Uzun Hassan and David IV Komnenos (who were related by marriage, as Uzun Hassan's wife was the daughter of the Emperor of Trebizond) in an anti-Ottoman coalition, the Pope sent envoy Ludovico da Bologna to the East, who had been conducting negotiations with Eastern countries since the time of Pope Callixtus III. Ludovico da Bologna was to present European battle plans to the aforementioned Eastern rulers as part of the coalition (Makharadze, Shashikadze, 2021:24). In 1460, Bologna returned to Europe from the East, bringing with him five envoys – two from the Kingdom of Georgia (one from King George VIII, another from the ruler of Samtskhe, Qvarqvare), one from the state of the White Sheep Turkmens, and one from the Empire of Trebizond (Paichadze, 1989: 89). The delegation travelled first through Hungary, then, in October, to the Holy Roman Empire and arrived in Rome on December 20,

holding an audience with the Pope on December 26 (Makharadze, Shashikadze, 2021:25). Despite immense efforts and attempts, the initiative to form a coalition once again ended in failure.

During the period when Pius II was engrossed in establishing a coalition against the Ottomans and strengthening ties with the East, Mehmed II's political manoeuvres increasingly thwarted the realization of Christian plans. The Sultan was well aware that the West was placing its greatest hopes on the Empire of Trebizond, which prompted him to decide on its conquest (Makharadze, 2005:33). In 1461, with a fleet of up to two hundred biremes and triremes [galleys] and ten warships [galleons] (Georgica, Vol.VIII, 1970:29), preparations were initiated in the spring to subjugate Trebizond. Before reaching Trebizond, Mehmed decided to move against the White Sheep Turkmens, a decision that did not result in a favourable outcome for Uzun Hassan, who then prepared his army for defence and appealed to the ruler of the Karamanid beylik, which also did not bear fruit (Makharadze, 2005:33-34). Mehmed II launched an assault on the fortress of Yoros and after three days of siege, it succumbed, leading Uzun Hassan's mother to appear in the Sultan's court with precious gifts, setting conditions that the White Sheep Turkmens would not aid Trebizond (Svanidze, 2007:61-62). The Ottoman military, initially planning to march towards Erzurum, changed its course to Trebizond after the engagement with Uzun Hassan, and on August 15th, Emperor David IV Komnenos personally surrendered the keys of the city to the Sultan, thereby granting the Ottomans full control over Trebizond (Makharadze, 2005:34., Kinross, 1979:129). In 1463, the discredited David, along with his six sons and brother, was executed (Svanidze, 2007:65).

The passive response from the rulers of Western Europe, along with Mehmed II's victories in Serbia, Morea, against the White Sheep Turkmens, and in Trebizond, as well as internal strife within the Kingdom of Georgia, rendered the idea of forming an anti-Ottoman

coalition increasingly unrealistic. Pius II, having seen his hopes for a successful coalition dashed, turned to an unusual diplomatic approach, sending an extraordinary letter – *Epistola ad Mahometem* – to Sultan Mehmed II. There are two complete translations of the Latin letter, or the original: 1. a German translation by R. Gleis and M. Kohler (*Epistola ad Mahometem*, 2001); 2. an English translation by Albert R. Baca (*Epistle to Mohammed II*, 1990).

The letter Pius II penned to Mehmed II in 1461 appeared to be an attempt by the Pope to convert Mehmed to Christianity. In return, Pius offered peace between the Ottomans and Christians, the Pope's blessing, and support for Mehmed as a legitimate Christian ruler in the eyes of the West, as well as future support in his endeavors. The Pope wrote to the Sultan: "Mehmed, if you were enlightened, we would appeal to your terrible sword and direct it against those who threaten our homeland. Just as our predecessors, Stephen, Adrian, and Leo called upon Pepin (King of the Franks, 751-768) and Charlemagne (King of the Franks and Emperor, 768-814), and granted them the crowns of kings and emperors for destroying the enemies of the Church, we too would act in kind and crown you the greatest king in the world in return for your service" (*Histoire Des Papes*, 1842:263., Khubashvili, 2004:139).

Nancy Bisaha raises an intriguing question – was the letter sincerely written as an appeal for Mehmed II's conversion to Christianity, or was it a political ploy couched in the language of the day? The letter is quite lengthy, divided into fifty-nine sections, and contains arguments from doctrine, scripture, history, classical literature, and political reasoning (Bisaha, 2002:183). We have translated and presented only a portion of it here. Historians who assert that the letter never reached its intended recipient primarily base their argument on the lack of any record of its delivery to Istanbul, especially any evidence that Mehmed received it. However, the letter did exist, as Christians living in Europe, where it circulated



widely, read it. Furthermore, Pope Pius II does not mention the letter reaching its addressee in his other writings (Bisaha, 2002:183). Some scholars believe the letter did reach the Sultan, suggesting a shift by Pius II from a militant stance to one of assuming the role of God's peace broker (Bisaha, 2002:183).

Historian James Hankins views the letter as somewhat unrealistic but acknowledges it as a genuine effort, grounded in "established missionary traditions" (Hankins, 1995:128-130). Richard William Southern referred to the letter as a "moment of vision" and noted that it was inspired more by statecraft and humanism than by religion, resembling the appeals of a pope caught in an impossible situation (Southern, 1962:102). The notion that this letter was the last anti-Ottoman diplomatic struggle written by a despondent pope was first pointed out in Georgian historiography by D. Paichadze (Paichadze, 1989:74). Franz Babinger suggested that while the letter was indeed written, sending such a document with its content to the Ottoman Empire would have been impractical and overly fantastical for a recipient who flaunted the Islamic sacred standard in conquests immediately upon his accession to the sultanate (Babinger, 1968:6). Babinger bases his opinion on the Sultan's own words, proclaimed after the conquest of Constantinople: "...there should be only one empire, one faith, and one sovereignty in the world. No place in the world is better suited than Istanbul to be the center of this unity. By virtue of this city, I can rule the Christians under my authority..." (Babinger, 1951:140., İnalçık, 2019:227-228). Therefore, a counterproposal sent to the author of these words would not have been a successful political strategy.

R.J. Mitchell provides a different perspective, describing the work as that of the older, wiser, and more liberal Aeneas [Pius II, n.b]. who now addresses reason and humanist diplomacy rather than military conflicts (Mitchell, 1962:153-154). Kenneth Setton considered the letter to be a "product of inexplicable fantasy," suggesting that Pius

II, it seems, thought Sultan Mehmed II would renounce Islam and embrace Christianity if he could be made to understand that Christ was the principal intercessor for sins (Setton, 1997:233). Franco Gaeta, who notes the tensions in the letter and the inconsistencies between it and other letters of Pius II regarding the Ottomans, supports the idea that "for several weeks, it seems, Pius saw Mehmed II in a different light". Also, he refers to the letter as the pope's "cherished dream" (Gaeta, 1965:132., Bisaha, 2002:184).

In contrast to the views of the historians mentioned above, some scholars, such as Georg Voigt and Franco Cardini, assert that this letter was never intended to be sent to Sultan Mehmed II and was instead created for the Christian populace to rally the people and European rulers around the Pope's desire to form an anti-Ottoman coalition (Bisaha, 2002:184; Voigt, 1934:117). Indeed, considering the power of European states at the time, especially after the Hundred Years' War, any planned anti-Ottoman coalitions would have been truly quixotic actions. At this time, the Ottoman Empire was reaching its zenith militarily and politically. Cardini also speculated that the Pope's calls for a crusade in Europe were attempts to restore the papal hegemony that existed during the 11th to 13th centuries (Bisaha, 2002:184).

These interpretations belong to Western historians. Now, let's consider what Turkish historians think about this matter and then summarize.

Turkish historians pay attention to the letter only briefly. Halil İnalcık notes how the Pope called on Sultan Mehmed II to embrace Christianity - "Pius states that if he [Mehmed II, n.b.] accepts Christianity, he will become the most powerful ruler in the world with the title of canonical Emperor, and [the Pope] will grant him the title of 'Emperor of the Greeks' [of Byzantium]. The East, which he holds by force and unjustly, will become his lawful possession, and all Christians will submit to him. He [the Pope] laid down the condition that by his [the Sultan's] honour, they would recognize him [the

Sultan] as arbitrator to end the war, and many would acknowledge, submit to, and direct their power against those who oppose the rights of the Church of Rome" (Kritovoulos, 2019:209., İnalçık, 2019:228). Halil İnalçık, referring to an event mentioned by Kemalpaşazâde, uses it as an argument that even if the letter reached Mehmed, it would not have had an effect - "Mehmed II the Conqueror gathered the respected Patriarch of Constantinople, the Armenian Patriarch, and the Chief Rabbi in Istanbul and as early as the summer of 1456, he ordered them to prepare a world map for an intended conquest. The Conqueror (the title Mehmed II was given after the conquest of Constantinople) considered himself as the sword of Allah and the spreader of faith on earth" (İnalçık, 2019:229., Kemalpaşazâde; 164). İnalçık also notes that Pius II had information about Mehmed's desire to conquer Italy, which he also mentions in his epistles (İnalçık, 2019:510). İnalçık, like that section of scholars, thinks that the reason for writing the letter was the Pope's desperate situation. Let's present the translation of some parts of the letter:

#### **Part I**

“We write to you with the purpose of your salvation, on the path of Allah, the Conqueror, for the achievement of your glory and honour, as well as for peace and comfort among nations. We ask you to listen to our words before you make a decision.

If our message is acceptable, we urge you to accept it; if we are incorrect, throw it into the fire and burn it. Do not reject this letter simply because it comes from a Christian, for this letter comes from the head of all Christians.. We are not against you, but we are against what you have done. Christianity also seeks salvation for its enemies; it does not differentiate between Greeks, Latins, Jews, and Muslims. Do not close your ears, because the religion of Muhammad also recognizes Jesus as a great prophet. Jesus was born of a virgin [Mary] and was known for his miracles. Turks and Christians have committed all kinds of sins to prevail by the sword. You also desire the submission of the

Latins. Your strength is among us. Some might think that because of the differences between us, it will be easy for you to invade these places [Christian territories]. But truly, you do not know our resources and the strength of the Christian nation: perhaps you are unaware of the power of Spain, the warlike spirit of France, the might of the German nation, the valor of Britain, the defiance of Poland, the resilience of Hungary, and the wealth, energy, and war experience of Italy. Only Hungary has troubled you and your predecessors for many years... Only Hungary has stood against you for seventy years; have you ever thought about how you would survive in the face of the great armies and resources of Italy, France, and Germany?

The Emperor Justinian previously sent Belisarius with a small force to Italy and united Rome and Italy to the Alps; you are no less than Justinian. Be cautious, some envoys and many sick people here [in Italy] or abroad might deceive you; because rulers listen to those who speak of greatness... It is true that Justinian ruled over Greece and Asia, but he could not conquer Italy, he only expelled the barbarous Goths who had invaded. The love for the Roman Empire is still warm in the minds of the Italians, and nobody agrees to be subjugated under the foreign yoke of Belisarius. Belisarius did not restore freedom to the Italians, they secured their own freedom.

Your predecessors neither noticed Italy nor conquered it. You have no right to rule over Italy. If you demand an invasion of Italy with audacity, you will meet people prepared for battle. Today, those who previously ruled cannot subjugate what is there now. Today, all of Italy is full of armoured horsemen and does not lack money... Here the matter is settled by the sword. You will meet robust men, armoured on horseback.

On the other hand, the differences between [Italian] states are advantageous to you. But if you approach the heart of the Christian world, you will find all Christians united before you, ready to unite in case of an invasion, forgetting enmity with one another and uniting

against a common enemy [the Ottomans]. It is possible, though difficult, for the entire Christian world to gather to resist your assault.

There are people in your household who have travelled to Italy and have seen our strength. You can ask them and compare your resources to those of Italy. There may also be those who say that our ongoing wars will facilitate your entry into Italy, but here you will not find anyone who wants to be dominated by a non-Christian. Everyone is ready to die for the Christian religion. You will not see here what your predecessors did with the Greeks, where both sides opposed each other for power, the Turks sometimes supporting one, sometimes the other, and finally both were exhausted, and in the end, the Turks seized both sides and brought them under their rule. In Italy, the states are not so, some are monarchies, some are republics. For instance, the Republic of Venice is mentally and financially strong and obeys the Christian religion.

We believe that instead of the enemies of religion [Christianity] entering Italy, they would choose death. Even if the neighbours do not help, only Venice is capable of avoiding this by itself, for it is very strong on the sea and on land. Or do you have any conception of the greatness, power, wealth, and unity of the Christian religion in Florence? Do you believe that this city can provide a gateway for representatives of another religion to enter Italy?

In this country [Italy], there are other great cities, many notable people, and great leaders. Let's just mention the Kingdom of Sicily, but at present, there are two kings warring there, neither of whom desires to win with your help, in which case they are ready to lose the kingdom. If either of them turns to you, all the rulers of Italy will be outraged. As for the Duke of Milan, his army is remarkable - a match for kings."

## **Part II**

"If you believe that because you have already subjected many Christian territories, the rest will also yield and surrender to you, you

are mistaken. Those Christians who have submitted to you are truncated from the truth of the Bible. Even the Greeks did not accept, at their time, the decisions of the Council of Florence (1439), and they set themselves on the wrong path. It is possible that some rulers might heedlessly submit to you for the sake of temporary benefits. Strong Christian cities in Italy will never bow their heads before your armies. Didn't a few men with crosses on their chests in Belgrade stand against your forces? (This refers to the Ottoman defeat and the defence of the city of Belgrade in 1456).

Therefore, we come to the main reason that compelled us to write this letter, specifically, how you can ensure your glory and honour and your salvation in the afterlife; For this, please pay attention to the following issues: If you wish to establish your authority over the Christians and make your name as renowned as possible, you do not need money, weapons, armies, or naval forces. A small thing can make you the most powerful and famous person today. It is baptism with a few drops of holy water; this is enough to lead you to Christian prayers and biblical faith. If you accept this, there will be no other ruler in the world who will surpass your honour and authority. We will acknowledge you as the ruler of the Greeks and the East [Byzantium]. You will justly continue to possess what you currently hold by force and unjustly.

### **Part III**

"[...] If you embrace Christianity, all these conflicts will come to an end and a universal peace will be established. Why do you fear it? why do you avoid baptism?

Yes, the Turks in your household may scare you, saying, 'If a Turk abandons his faith, he is no longer a Turk, he loses everything and will be alone.' However, there will be those who will support you, for many Christians will emerge in your service in the future... They [the Sultan's court and the Ottoman population] do not despise Christians; they are personally loyal to you. Consider all this; rally

your armies and provincial leaders, and all is ready for making a decision. When the Greek and Armenian subjects see that you have adopted their religion, they will wait with greater hope and will be saved from the taxes and oppressions they encounter daily.

If you become a Christian, following the example of Constantine the Great (Roman Emperor from 306-337), everything grand awaits you ahead. Other Turks will be enlightened by you. This will be a greater deed than any other victory. Nations will always praise you in Greek, Latin, and barbarous tongues. No one dying will have more honour or power over you. Your current power and glory are transient... Everything in this world is transient" (İnalçık, 2019:751-761).

It should be noted that the letter written by the Pope once again confirms that Pius II was a "diplomatic Pope". In a desperate situation, he used all his powers and arguments to try to Christianize Mehmed II. The Pope calls upon the Sultan to embrace Christianity while also fearing the power of Venice and Florence should he overstep in Italy. Venice had previously been at war with the Ottomans (1422 -1430), and accordingly, it would likely come out to defend Italy in the future. As for Florence, it is possible that the Pope considered the future conflicts of this republic with the Ottomans, but the Florentines, especially the ruling Medici – the unofficial dukes – were positively inclined towards the Ottomans. The historian Michael Ajipinar notes in his monograph that by 1460 the presence and activity of Florentines in the Ottoman Empire had significantly increased. For instance, the Florentine merchant Benedetto Dei (1418-1492) had gained enough trust with the Ottoman administration and with the Grand Vizier Mahmud Pasha (1456-1468 / 1472-1474) to be granted audiences with the Sultan (ACIPINAR, 2016:36).

Apart from Venice and Florence, the letter also refers to other Western European powers, but Pius seems to overestimate their capabilities. The Pope is trying in every way not to show the Sultan

any sign of weakness or desperation and repeatedly emphasizes the commitment of the Italian city-states to Christianity and their readiness for battle. Interestingly, the letter brings up the argument of the Christianization of Constantine I, which took place in 337, just before the emperor's death. Despite Constantine's positive disposition and reforms towards Christians, he remained a pagan until the end of his life, finally converting to Christianity on his deathbed and being remembered as "the Great" in both the East and the West. The Eastern Christian Church even sanctified him (Khubashvili, 2016:150-151). Pius warns the Sultan of the potential opposition he might face from Muslims or subjects within the Ottoman Empire if he renounces Islam and accepts Christianity.

### **Results**

It is regrettable that we do not possess concrete evidence as to whether the letter reached Sultan Mehmed II, nor do we know if he read it or what response he may have returned to the Pope. However, considering the state of Western European powers at the time, as well as the Pope's own precarious situation following the unsuccessful Congress of Mantua, we can draw certain conclusions. From the historical notes discussed above, we do not share the view of some researchers who consider the letter's writing merely as a means to incite European monarchs and populations into an anti-Ottoman coalition. While examining the letter, I developed certain questions, which I believe I have managed to answer. If the Pope publicized this letter to rally Europeans against the Ottomans, why did he need to enumerate the strengths of nations that were, at the time, weakened and whose leaders were fully aware of their own limitations? Moreover, the fact that the Pope seemed unaware of Florence's dependency on the Ottomans, unequivocally declaring Italy's defence without any doubt, is significant. Furthermore, the letter calls for a religious conversion that was the most ardent enemy at that time, suggesting that weakened European monarchs, instead of uniting in an



anti-Ottoman coalition, were more content to hear news of the Sultan's conversion to Christianity – which, of course, never happened. Instead, they further embraced the spread of Islam across the world, and after the subjugation of the Egyptian Mamluks in 1517, the Ottoman Sultans also carried the title of Caliph.

As for the calls to embrace Christianity, the Pope tries to persuade Mehmed II with such great eagerness and solid arguments that it seems highly unlikely that the letter from diplomat Pius II was meant only for European monarchs. I am confident that Pius was well aware of the strength of European states after a century-long war. And from a diplomat who was in a hopeless situation following the unsuccessful Congress of Mantua, it is not surprising that the letter was indeed sent to the Sultan. I believe he knew in advance what Mehmed's response to the letter might be, but it represented his ultimate attempt to bring Constantinople and the Eastern Church under papal dominion.

In the preliminary article, the main literature and sources were discussed as comprehensively as possible, leading to certain conclusions. The article does not claim to provide the final and exhaustive conclusion to the text. As an engaging topic in academia, it may well attract further attention in the future, and the narrative may be expanded with the discovery of new sources and literature.

In summary, several outcomes seem evident:

1. Pius II knew that after the fall of Constantinople, Rome was one of the next principal targets for the Ottomans.
2. The Pope composed his letter in a desperate situation and as a reaction to the disintegration of an anti-Ottoman coalition, making it his last grand attempt to prevent Mehmed II from launching an invasion into Italy.
3. The letter reached Istanbul and was indeed read by the Sultan, which resulted in the Ottomans actively starting preparations for an

invasion of Italy. A war with Venice began in 1463, and a full-scale expedition aiming for the conquest of all of Italy took place between 1480-1481, which, due to Mehmed II's assassination, ended unsuccessfully.

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