



The reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II from 1876 to 1878

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Abstract

The paper discusses the first two years of the reign of the 34th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Abdulhamid II, which is known as the “First Constitution Era”. With the overthrow of Sultan Murad V and the ascension of his brother, the Ottoman Empire entered an era of Absolutism that brought a new reality to both the great powers of Europe and the weakened Ottoman Empire.

The article discusses the key events of 1876-1878 based on foreign literature, such as the Sultan Abdülhamid's II ascension to the throne, the struggle against the European states, the Istanbul Conference, the adoption of the Constitution, the formation and dismissal of the Parliament, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, the Treaty of San Stefano, the Congress of Berlin and the Chirac Incident. With all of this in mind, we've tried to get through the first two years of the Ottoman Empire's autocratic rule, which had a great impact not only on the politics of the great powers of Europe, but also on Georgia.

Keywords: Ottomans; Ottomans in the 19th century; Abdulhamid II; Hamidian; Istanbul Conference; Russo-Ottoman War; Magnificent Porta; San-Stefano; Congress of Berlin; Çırağan Incident.

Introduction

The second half of the 19th century is characterized by difficult internal socio-political situation and external problems for the Ottoman Empire. The reforms of The Tanzimat, which begun in 1839, did not achieve the desired result and provoked opposition from large numbers of the population. The reforms were especially facilitated by the sultan's authority and the conservative part of the Muslim clergy. Added to this were the usurpation of the royal court, the old, backward system of agriculture, the monopoly of foreign capital, and the revolts of the populations of the conquered territories. With the crisis reaching its most critical levels since 1875, the empire entered a period that can safely be described as chaotic. The state treasury was completely destroyed, the state could not pay the loans that were periodically granted after the Crimean War. At the same time, the great powers of Europe launched a major diplomatic offensive. With all of this in mind, in 1876, demonstrations began in Istanbul. On 30 May, Sultan Abdulaziz was deposed and replaced by Murad V, who was soon replaced by his brother, the 34th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Abdulhamid II (1842-1919), thus beginning the era of autocracy and absolutism in the Ottoman Empire.

The reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II is less studied in Georgian historiography, but during his reign there are significant changes in the political map of the world. The consequences of his policy are interesting for the history of Georgia, since during his reign the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 began. By the Treaty of San Stefano and the subsequent Berlin Congress, the Georgian territories included in the Russian Empire were annexed by the lands of historical Georgia, and Batumi was declared a free trade city. In addition, after this war, the process of emigration of Georgian Muslims was particularly

accelerated and intensified, which, in fact, It led to the depopulation of the Adjara-Kobuleti.

We're interested in the first two years of the 34th sultan's long reign, which was marked by internal turmoil and external political strife. Using literature in foreign languages, we tried to break down the chronological development of important events that had a great impact on the domestic and foreign policy of the Ottoman Empire. We think the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II, as one of the most interesting political figures, can be seen as both negative and positive. And that's our goal, and that's what we've clearly outlined in this paper.

Methods

The above-mentioned period of the Ottoman Empire has not been studied in Georgian historiography, therefore, based on foreign literature and sources, we have worked on the previous work using historical-ontological and historical-comparative research methods.

Results

As a result of the research, the significant period of the Ottoman Empire enters the Georgian historical space. The immediate aim of the study was to describe the first two years of the political activity of the 34th Ottoman sultan. The study identified such individual issues as Sultan Abdülhamid's II ascension to the throne, the struggle against the European powers, the Istanbul Conference, the adoption of the Constitution, the formation and dismissal of the Parliament, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, the Treaty of San Stefano, the Congress of Berlin, and the Chirağan Incident.

Contents

The reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) can be divided into several stages. The first two years of his reign (1876-1878) are considered from the Ascension to the throne to the end of the Russo-Ottoman War.

The sultan's education was not at all what it was in the 1850s. He actually had a basic level of education; however, he gained a great deal of international European experience when he accompanied his

uncle, Sultan Abdulaziz (1830-1876) to Europe in June-August 1867. During his travels, the future sultan observed the development of France, Great Britain, Prussia, and Austria. In addition, he was actively involved in agricultural activities, which was a true Achilles' heel for the Ottoman Empire of the period (Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, 2009: 7). His interest in agriculture was due to his closeness to the English Thompson family, who owned a farm in Arabia. In addition, he used every means to communicate with the Ottoman high society and discussed with them the problems of the empire. Particularly close to him in these early days were an Englishman named Thompson, who owned a farm next to his at Tarabya, and two lesser Tanzimat bureaucrats, Ibrahim Ethem Efendi and Mehmet Esat Saffet Efendi, most famous of the nineteenth-century ministers of education, both of whom subsequently served him for a time as grand vezirs. His personal finances were handled by a well-known Armenian Galata banker, Hagop Zarifi Bey, from whom he gained a knowledge of finance and economics that was to serve him well in later times. The young prince was thus a sincere though somewhat dour and persistent young man who was determined to prepare himself as best he could for the task of rescuing the empire (Stanford J. Shaw, Ezel Kural Shaw, 2005: 172).

Despite the extremely difficult conditions, the ruling circles, led by Ahmed Midhad Pasha, had a clear sense of the need for reform. They supported the ideas of the Young Ottomans, primarily the idea of constitutional reform. They managed to get past the representatives of the Muslim clergy. The Sultan wanted to restore his power, he was not in a hurry to issue such a document, but was forced to follow their will due to internal and external political factors (Karpát, Zens, 2003: 249-253).

The main creator of this process was Midhad Pasha, who still maintained his leadership in the cabinet. He used the Great Powers Conference as a springboard to justify the immediate promulgation of a constitution that would establish parliamentary rule. He claimed that his announcement would prevent other states from interfering in

Ottoman affairs on the pretext of carrying out reforms. In response to his persistent request, Abdulhamid ordered on 7 October that a constitutional commission be created to work on the drafting of a constitution, headed by Ahmed Midfat Fasha (Stanford J. Shaw, Ezel Kural Shaw, 2005: 174).

During the drafting of the constitution, there was a heated debate on a number of issues, such as equating the national minority languages with Turkish-Ottoman, which failed. Also, the Sultan's demand for the provisions on the responsibility of ministers, the Freedom of the Press Act and so on. On 6 December, the cabinet finally gave its approval to the commission's work, although the sultan insisted on the inclusion of the State Security Law, which implied the sultan's prerogative to remove anyone deemed a threat to state security. Despite the opposition, this law was passed as Article 113 of the Constitution. The Constitution of 1876 consisted of 119 articles and 12 sections. On the face of it, this Western document was not at all pure Western, and it incorporated the experience and practices of the Ottoman Empire (Stanford J. Shaw, Ezel Kural Shaw, 2005: 178). In the early period of the Ottoman Empire, administrative and institutional systems were developed according to the religion of Islam. Therefore, these institutional and administrative systems, with their structures, components and laws, remained unchanged until the 19th century. The organization of the state and its accompanying laws greatly integrated both religion and customs. However, due to the processes of Westernization, during the last few decades of the empire, religion and custom were re-considered as part of the institutional and administrative systems (Korkut. H, 2016: 116).

According to the constitution of 23 December 1876, the Sultan was declared the "Supreme Caliph", who is the protector of the Muslim world. The sultan's personality was sacred, and he was accountable to no one for his actions. He had the power to appoint or remove ministers, or the entire cabinet. Make treaties and declare war and peace. The sultan was the commander-in-chief of both the navy and

the army, and had the power to summon and dismiss the parliament. The new constitution also dealt with press, education, administrative and judicial matters. Torture and the Inquisition were prohibited by the constitution (The Ottoman Constitution (23 December 1876), 2005: 1-13). In reality, for all practical purposes, Abdulhamid II remained as powerful as his predecessor, and his first victim after overcoming the international threat was Midhat Pasha himself.

As for the parliament, a bicameral parliament was created: the Senate, whose members were appointed by the sultan himself, and the Chamber of Deputies, elected by the municipal and district councils. They were to meet once a year, from November 1 to March 1. Members of the Senate were required to be over 40 years of age and to have held important public office. They were appointed for life, but had to resign if called to other offices (Article 62). A member had to be over 25 years of age, own property, and pay taxes. Their number was fixed at one man for every 50,000 Ottomans (Article 65). The term of office was four years, and each deputy represented the nation as a whole, not just his province (Article 71). In the Chamber of Deputies there were 71 Muslims, 44 Christians and 4 Jews. Twenty-one Muslims and five non-Muslims were appointed to the Senate by the Sultan. The Sultan had the power to veto any law (Sanikidze. G, Alasania. G, Gelovani. N, 2011: 77). It is noteworthy that the Sultan summoned Parliament only twice in 1877 and 1878. It should also be said that while the sultan established a one-man dictatorship, he did share some of the ideals and principles of the Tanzimat, so it would not be surprising to say that he cooperated with the existing administration, which consisted of members of various schools and associations related to the Tanzimat. In short, the sultan generally agreed with what the administration offered, especially during the Russo-Ottoman War (Çetinsaya. G, 2019: 40). Despite Abdulhamid's initial active participation in the work of the Parliament, he still faced great opposition, so on 13 February 1878, Sultan Abdulhamid II dissolved the Parliament and restored the autocracy (Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, 2009:7).

In July 1876, Montenegro and Serbia declared war on the Ottomans, although the Ottoman army was able to defeat Serbia, but in this situation, Russia issued an ultimatum to the Sultan, resulting in the convening of a conference of great powers in Istanbul in December 1876 to discuss the terms of the truce between Serbia and the Ottomans. Just prior to the opening of this conference, on December 23, 1876, the Sultan signed the Ottoman constitution, which was largely modelled on the Belgian constitution, though different.

The promulgation of the constitution, of course, coincided with the official opening of the Istanbul Conference, which was held in the offices of the Ministry of the Navy at the Imperial Dockyard on the Golden Horn. When the first session convened, the delegates were stunned by the salute of the guns, who informed every one of the adoption of the constitution. Safed Pasha, an old friend of the Sultan and now Minister of Foreign Affairs, was quick to tell the conference that the reforms demanded by the European states were no longer a matter for discussion, since they were enshrined in the Constitution (Stanford J. Shaw, Ezel Kural Shaw, 2005: 178). The new constitution allowed the Ottomans not to give up the territories seized by Serbia and Montenegro, as the constitution declared the empire a single, indivisible entity. Also, the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, because the Constitution declared everyone equal. The creation of local Christian militias and the introduction of a separate court for Muslims were also unconstitutional. It is also worth noting that at the Istanbul Conference, the interests of the Ottoman Empire were much more strictly represented by Midhad Pasha than by the Sultan. It was strongly opposed to the goals of the great powers of Europe. They proposed to the Ottomans the division of Bulgaria into two vilayets, Eastern and Western. There, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, new courts of appeal should be set up. They were appointed indefinitely with the authorities, and local languages were used in the courts, as well as Ottoman-Turkish. Tobacco and customs duties would be transferred to the central treasury, but all other taxes would remain

for provincial expenditures, and the tithes would be replaced by a new land tax. Muslim soldiers would remain confined to the major cities and fortresses, while Christian and Muslim militias would be organized to control the countryside in areas where their co-religionists were the majority. All Circassian refugees were to be sent to Anatolia, a local gendarmerie was to be formed with European officers, and 5,000 Belgian soldiers were to be sent to help Bulgaria, as well as lands occupied by Muslims were to be given to Christians for cultivation.

This proposal was more unacceptable to Porta than the old one, although Salisbury threatened the Ottoman Empire that if the plan was rejected, Russia would attack and Britain would do nothing to help Porta. Despite this threat, Midhat Pasha, encouraged by the British Ambassador in Istanbul (Sir Henry Elliott), refused the offer. Salisbury and the German representatives raised some demands for a Christian governor in Bulgaria and a Belgian gendarmerie, but the Midhat Pasha rejected them as well, and the conference dissolved in utter disappointment on 20 January 1877 (*ibid.*: 180). In February, a peace treaty was signed directly between Serbia and Sultan Abdul Hamid II on the basis of restoring the status quo (Sanikidze. G, Alasania. G, Gelovani. N, 2011: 75).

The end of the conference was followed by another important decision in the circle of Ottoman rulers. The sultan clearly disliked the grand vizier, Midhad Pasha, who was credited with implementing reforms and wielding great authority both within the country and abroad. His last plans, which incurred the wrath of the Sultan, were to enrol Christian students in a military academy and to reject Mahmud Nedim's program of refinancing the state debt. Eventually, Abdulhamid decided to send Midhat Pasha on a "long journey" to Europe (February 5, 1877) following the departure of the foreign plenipotentiaries from Istanbul. Midhad Pasha, who had been stripped of the Grand Vizier's ring, was read Article 113 of the Constitution and deported. The new Grand Vizier, a trusted person of the Sultan, was

Ibrahim Ethem Pasha, who had previously been the Chairman of the Council of State.

One of the main challenges of the beginning of Abdulhamid's reign was the Russian Empire, which was in clear opposition to the Ottoman Empire's interests in the Balkans. After his defeat in the Crimean War of 1853, the emperor tried to regain his lost prestige. The Istanbul Conference precipitated the expected Russo-Ottoman war. The main concern of the Russian Empire was what position Austria would occupy in the coming war. The Austrian Empire was in a military crisis at the time, the irregular state of the army halting the latter and promising Russia neutrality in the coming war. The Russo-Austrian Treaty of Neutrality was signed in Budapest on 15 January 1877.

According to the treaty, Austria retained the right to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina whenever it wished; Serbia, Montenegro, and Novipasar were to remain neutral and not occupy any of the signatories; Russia would receive Bessarabia, and the Allies would support each other against any resistance by other powers; no specific provisions were made regarding Bulgaria, although the treaty forbade the formation of any major state on the territory. If the Ottoman Empire had completely collapsed, Istanbul would have been a free city, not of Russia or Greece, but the latter would have been compensated with Crete, Thessaly and southern Epirus. Russia acquired a neutral ally against Porta, while Austria gained significant territory and also a guarantee that she, and not Russia, would dominate Serbia - all in exchange for mere neutrality (Stanford J. Shaw, Ezel Kural Shaw, 2005: 181) Thus, on 16 April 1877, Russia obtained permission from Romania for the Tsar's army to transit through its territory. On April 24, 1877, the Russian ambassador informed the Grand Porte that his state had declared war on the Ottomans.

Before the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, the Russian-Ottoman military contingent was almost equal, although the Tsar's army was relatively under-equipped. In the Ottoman army, the Achilles'

heel was an unqualified officer corps, which is why the Russian emperor considered winning the war inevitable.

Abdulhamid II first appealed to the signatories of the Paris Peace Treaty for help. He was especially trusted by the British, although Disraeli, who openly opposed Russia's growing ambitions in Eastern Europe, failed to win cabinet support for English intervention in the war and had to leave the Ottomans to fight on their own.

The main objective of the Russian campaign was to cross the Balkan Mountains and approach Istanbul and the Straits to the west as quickly as possible, as well as to move into north-eastern Anatolia and capture Kars, Ardahan and Erzurum, in order to force the port to accept the proposals rejected at the Istanbul Conference. Once the Russians were able to control the Black Sea and go through Anatolia to Alexandria, it would have free access to the Mediterranean. The Slavic states in the Balkans would also be freed from Ottoman control and remain under strong Russian influence. In this way, the emperor's position in the alliance of European powers would be strengthened. For defensive purposes, the Ottoman main line was formed on the Danube, while the area between Varna and Vidin was heavily fortified, and the main units were concentrated in Silistra, Ruse, Nicopolis and Vidin. The Balkan Mountains formed a second line of defence from the Varna, Shumen and Sofia bases. In the east, the garrisons of Kars and Erzurum were heavily manned. Russia did not have time to rebuild the Black Sea Fleet, so the Ottomans were not intimidated in this direction, but nevertheless planned to send only light ships to the Danube to help supply their defence forces (See also 183).

By June 1877, the Russians were making active attack into the Balkans and were effectively gaining the upper hand. The entry of the Russian army into northern Bulgaria was accompanied by a large-scale slaughter of Turkish peasants to prevent the movement of troops and supplies. A great battle was fought on 16 July at Nicopolis. Shocked by a series of catastrophes in the Ottoman army in Istanbul, the sultan replaced all the major military commanders who had survived the

battles. The commander-in-chief was appointed by Suleiman Pasha, former head of the military academy.

The new sultan was faced with a difficult situation. The empire suffered a series of catastrophic defeats. In order to win the support of the people, Abdulhamid declared himself a „Ghazi”, warrior for the faith against the infidels, and declared the war a holy war. In doing so, he succeeded in arousing the passions of the people and mobilizing the men needed for the war. At the same time, his deputy Suleiman Pasha attacked the Russians by land in northern Bulgaria and pushed them back with the Shipka Pass. The successes of the right wing of the Russian army (first the victory of Sistova, then the capture of Vidin) were stopped by the Ottomans in Plevna with a strong defence.

The Eastern campaigns followed a similar pattern. Initially, the Ottomans were hampered by the division of their defence forces, which were scattered in various fortresses that the Russians could attack between the Black Sea and Lake Van. The Russians attacked and captured the main strongholds one by one, first in Ardahan (18 May 1877) and then in Dogubeyazit (20 June). The Ottomans suffered heavy losses in terms of manpower and military equipment. The main Ottoman defensive center became Kars. The remaining troops in this area were assembled under the command of Ahmed Muhtar Pasha, who soon managed to stop the Russian advance.

The Russian Empire's plans for a quick victory were foiled. So, the war went on. The emperor had to change his plans and began negotiations with the Balkan states. Serbia has agreed to enter the war, but until they take Plevna they are not sure of the Russian victory. The Greeks also requested that the Ottomans be driven into Thrace by offensive, but by this time they were so impressed by the Ottoman army and the threat of British intervention that they refused to provide assistance without Russian assurances that they would conquer both Epirus and Thessaly. As for Romania, it was not in a position to say no to the Russians or to let them down. His army assisted the Russians in a new siege of Pleven, which continued. To commemorate

his heroic resistance against the Russians, Abdulhamid awarded the title of Gazi to his commanders, Osman Pasa, as well as Muhtar Pasa for their exploits in the east.

The war was indeed going from bad to worse, as the long Russian siege eventually damaged the main Ottoman defences, both to the east and to the west. On 14 October 1877, 6,500 Ottoman troops were forced to surrender at Aladag, and on 14 November Muhtar Pasha left Kars, although he was able to return most of his troops and heavy equipment to Erzurum. As for the Balkans, here, Gazi Osman Pasha was forced to submit to the suffering of the soldiers and the 42,000 survivors around him and surrender. On December 10, 1877, Plevna fell. With this, the Western Front was broken. King Milan of Serbia immediately gained the courage needed to declare independence (January 24) and declare war (January 28), capture Pirot on the Bulgarian border and besiege and take Niş (February 11). On January 9, 1878, the defenders of Papka Pass were defeated. All this cost the Ottomans another 32,000 men and 103 large shells. Suleiman Pasha managed to escape himself, and he took over the protection of Sofia. But the Ottoman forces were now too scattered. Soon it too fell, and this was followed by Edirne (January 20) without real opposition. At the same time, together with the Ottoman garrisons of Montenegro engaged in the east, the Montenegrins also declared war and occupied Bari (January 15) and Ulcinj (January 19) (*ibid.*: 186).

Russia's rapid advance into Bulgaria alarmed Britain and Austria. They realized that the Greater Bulgaria, as the emperor had envisioned, would only be a tool for Russia's domination of South-eastern Europe. Nevertheless, Russian troops, under the command of Grand Duke Nicholas, advanced towards Istanbul and forced the Porta to ask for a cease-fire agreement, which was signed in Edirne on 31 January. Before holding the peace conference, the Ottomans surrendered the remaining Bulgarian strongholds in Vidin, Ruse and Silistra. Russia and the Ottomans agreed that Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria would receive autonomy through European-supervised reforms, that Russia

would have full rights to use the straits, and that the Porta would pay war reparations. In short, it was an unconditional surrender to the victor. The conference between the Ottomans and Russia was held in San Stefano (Yeşilköy), near Istanbul.

The failure of the war activated the Sultan's opposition. In parliament, the attention of deputies was diverted to military disasters, and instead of concentrating on legislation, they turned to criticism of the government, the conduct of offensive campaigns, the incompetence of officers, and the overall direction of the war effort. There was also the issue of the return of Midhat Pasha, which the sultan's representatives did not like. In addition, liberal and non-Muslim deputies began circulating no-confidence petitions against some ministers and the palace environment. The final straw was on 13 February, when the Sultan gathered the Chamber of Deputies, including members of Parliament, to consult with them on inviting the British fleet and entering the Sea of Marmara, thus helping to defend Istanbul against a possible Russian advance. After the majority of the deputies had declared their agreement, one of them, Naji Ahmed, who was a cook and the head of one of the guilds, told Sultan: "You asked for our opinion too late; you should have asked for ours before the catastrophe could have been avoided". The Chamber disclaims all responsibility for a situation for which it has done nothing. (Zabtt Ceridesi II, 401: 243-244) That was the end. The next day Abdulhamid dissolved Parliament and simply stated that he had done his duty, but the current situation was not suitable for the proper exercise of his functions" (ibid: 243-244). Abdulhamid initially also ordered the arrest of all deputies who were most critical of the government, but upon the insistence of Ahmed Vefik, he changed the order and demanded that they return to their homes immediately. Although some deputies protested that he had violated the constitution, the parliament was nevertheless dissolved (Celaleddin, M., *Mirat-t Hakikat*, C. III: 60-62). However unpredictable this end and his actions were, the Sultan would rule without parliament for the next three decades, acting within the powers gra-

nted to him by the constitution. He simply used the crisis to enforce provisions that Midhat and his colleagues had passed to protect the constitution from conservative reaction. By leaving Parliament and weakening the Porte, Abdulhamid laid the foundations for the autocracy that would dominate the Ottoman government for the remaining years of his reign (Stanford J. Shaw, Ezel Kural Shaw, 2005: 187).

Because of internal political and economic problems, neither side wanted to prolong the war. Thus, on March 3, 1878, the San Stefano Peace Conference was held. The treaty was based on the terms of a truce signed a month earlier in Edirne and largely fulfilled the demands of the Pan-Slavs. Montenegro and Serbia were to be independent, however the latter, due to its bad war, was to receive only a few additions along the southern border, including Niş, the Drina Valley, and part of the Novi Pazar Sanjak. Porta was to recognize the independence of Romania and pay it war reparations in the form of a portion of Dobruja. He agreed to Russia's annexation of Bessarabia. And Bulgaria was supposed to be autonomous.

The Sultan agreed to pay a huge war indemnity of 1.4 billion rubles (24 billion Kuruş, four times the state's annual income), less than half of which was paid to Dobruja, by surrendering large areas of the islands, the Danube, and the eastern Anatolian provinces of Kars, Ardahan, Batumi, and Dogubayazit. Residents of the annexed Russian territories were allowed to sell their property within three years, which led to an influx of refugees into the Ottoman Empire. By the treaty, all Christian subjects of the sultan were placed under the protection of the Russian emperor. The Ottomans were only able to resist Ignatyev 's desire for a joint defence and administration of the straits.

Later, England and Austria-Hungary demanded a revision of the San Stefano provisions, which Bismarck supported. Austria demanded a territorial reduction of Bulgaria in order to weaken Russian power in Eastern Europe, and Russia agreed to Austria's annexation of Novipasar Sanjak, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina. Eastern Rumelia and the

restored Bulgaria were to be returned to the Ottoman Empire as autonomous provinces, with immediate reforms. Most of eastern Anatolia was to be returned to Porta, while in return the Russian Empire retained Kars, Batumi, and southern Bessarabia. Thus, a review of the San Stefano results laid the foundation for a conference that Bismarck convened in Berlin from June 13 to July 13, 1878.

Despite all of the agreements listed above, it was still difficult to achieve the sequence. The congress agreed to recognize the independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania. Austria-Hungary was given the right to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to Bulgaria and the Balkans, the Berlin Congress was also concerned with the question of the East. As a result of the congress, the Ottomans in the east were forced to leave Kars, Ardahan and Batumi for the Russians. Batumi became a free-trade city (Porto-Franco), which the emperor promised not to fortify. The Elishkirt valley and the Dogubayazit were returned to the Ottomans. Porta promised to carry out reforms in the Armenian-populated districts and to affirm full civil and religious freedom in the empire.

In total, according to the Congress of Berlin, the Ottoman Empire was forced to abandon two-fifths of its entire territory and one-fifth of its population, about 5.5 million people, almost half of whom were Muslims (ibid: 191).

The six months between the signing of the Armistice of Edirne (31 January 1878) and the signing of the Treaty of Berlin represented one of the most critical periods of Abdulhamid's reign. To better understand the depth and scale of subversion that developed by this time, it may help to recall the events of this critical period that also cleared the way for Abdulhamid to establish an autocratic regime: the cease-fire of Edirne (31 January 1878); the dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies (13 February 1878); the Treaty of San Stefano (3 May 1878); Chiragan incident (attempt to overthrow Abdulhamid, 20 May 1878); the handing over of Cyprus to Britain (4 June 1878); the June Conference and subsequent signing of the Treaty of Berlin (18 June 1878-

13). In terms of the impact and consequences of the Abdulhamid's regime, the two most important events on the list above were the break-up of the Chamber of Deputies and the Chirağan Incident (Çetinsaya, G, 2019: 40).

The Chirağan Incident of May 1878 was one of the critical moments of Abdulhamid's reign. Groups opposed to the sultan emerged from the beginning. The first such attempt occurred in early December 1876, when the sultan's brother, Murad V, was kidnapped from the Chirağan Palace. Their goal was to restore a mentally deranged former sultan to the throne, but that plan failed.

On May 20, 1978, two years after the former sultan was deposed, another sensational event occurred. There's been a rebellion in front of the Chirağan Palace. The leader of the revolt was the former headmaster of the Galatasaray Imperial College and former representative of the Young Ottomans, Ali Suavi. He was accompanied by a group of Muslim refugees from the Balkans, whose main frustration was the devastating actions of the army and the losses incurred as a result of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, in which the people blamed Abdulhamid II and thus supported the return of Murad V. Although this attack was intended to free Murad V and restore him to the throne, the affair was over in just one hour of fiasco. Ali Suavi and about fifty of his followers were killed by the imperial troops, and the survivors were arrested and put on trial.

This famous incident went down in history as the "Chirağan raid". According to Ibnulemin Mahmud Kemal Inal, this event marked the beginning of Abdul Hamid's autocracy. This incident marked a turning point for Abdulhamid II. After that, the sultan became more suspicious and untrustworthy, and he began to doubt even those he had previously trusted. After the coup attempt, Abdulhamid appointed those he suspected as governors of distant provinces, thus emptying the imperial capital. Among these figures were the Senate Chairman Kuchuk Said Pasha, who was first appointed Governor of Ankara and then, after he protested the post, was appointed Governor of Bursa; the

Prime Minister Mehmet Sadik Pasha, appointed Governor of the Vilayet of the Archipelago; Mehmet Akif Pasha, who was appointed Governor of Konya; the Englishman Said Pasha, appointed Governor of Ankara; and Mehmet Najif Pasha, the Chief Pasha (Bacımaşbeyn), who was appointed Marshal of the Fourth Army. Later, Damad Mahmud Jalaleddin Pasha was also dismissed from the post of marshal of the Tofan (artillery corps) and in January 1879, was supposedly appointed governor of Tripoli (Libya) (İnal, *Son Sadrazamlar*, II, 1002: 772-773). This apparently had a great impact on the sultan, and it was followed by a long period of "cleansing" of the sultan's entourage of suspicious figures, from bodyguards to regular soldiers.

Conclusion

During the first two years of Abdulhamid's reign, various international events contributed to the Ottoman Empire's ruling elite feeling that the empire was on the verge of collapse. The Russo-Ottoman War proved that the Ottoman Empire as a political entity was not viable. Separatist activities by Bulgarians, Armenians, and Greeks, as well as by Muslim groups such as Albanians, Arabs, and Kurds, threatened the stability of the empire (Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, 2009: 7).

In addition, this period is characterized by constant instability, which was caused by the relocation of the posts of Prime Minister and Grand Vizier. All of this set the stage for the uncertainty and political turmoil that followed. According to Ismail Hami Danişmend, from 1871 to 1882, the Ottoman Empire changed 23 grand viziers, an immense number in 10 years (Danişmend. I, 1971: 85). Although Abdulhamid's regime was noted for its authoritarian policies and actions, the sultan also promoted infrastructure and cultural modernization. During the reign of Abdulhamid, the Ottoman bureaucracy acquired rational and institutional characteristics, where admission and promotion to public office was based on objective criteria. Abdulhamid established governmental schools for boys and girls throughout the empire. Implemented railway construction with the support of foreign capital.

Started connecting distant provinces to the capital and extended telegraph lines to allow for administrative surveillance from Albania to Yemen. During his reign, the judicial system was reformed. It also greatly expanded access to literature. New translations were made from Western literature. Book printing increased, and Ottoman poetry and prose acquired worldly individualistic qualities. These changes had a profound impact on young people, resulting in the emergence of a Western-oriented generation that was dissatisfied with autocracy and demanded a constitutional monarchy. The opposition of the Young Turks came from that generation. Abdulhamid's attempts at modernization eventually laid the foundation for modern Turkey.

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