RISE OF NATIONALISM IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE:
HOW DID OTTOMAN GOVERNMENT RESPOND
TO THE BULGARIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT 1839-1870?*

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Abstract

Through the latter part of the 18th century, the existence of the Bulgarians as a nation was not widely known. Linguists still did not know that there existed a language such as Bulgarian. The people who travelled through the Balkan Peninsula never talked about the Bulgarian nation. The people living between the river Danube and Aegean Sea were known as either Turks or Greeks. Kapodistria, who was the foreign minister of Russia, sent a report to Cesar Nicola I stating the possibility of establishing five new Christian states in the Balkan Peninsula. According to this report, the lands in which the Bulgars were living were shown as Serbia. But after the 1840s, the whole of Europe would recognise the Bulgars as one of the populous nations of Europe and the political rights of the Bulgarian nation began to be talked about increasingly. Finally, in 1878 at Berlin, an agreement on the political rights of the Bulgars was acknowledged. In this paper I shall try to explain how the Ottoman government responded to the Bulgarian national movement between 1839 and 1870.

Key Words: Ottoman, Balkan Peninsula, Bulgars, Bulgarian national movement.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı, Balkan Yarımadası, Bulgarlar, Bulgar Milli Hareketi.

Introduction

Through the latter part of the 18th century, the existence of the Bulgarians as a nation was not widely known. Linguists still did not know that there existed a language such as Bulgarian. The people who travelled through the Balkan Peninsula never talked about the Bulgarian nation. The people living between the river Danube and Aegean Sea were known as either Turks or Greeks. Ioannis Kapodistrias, who was the foreign minister of Russia, sent a report to Tsar Nicola I stating the possibility of establishing five new Christian states in the Balkan Peninsula. According to this report, the lands in which the Bulgars were living were shown as Serbia. But after the 1840s, the whole of Europe would recognise the Bulgars as one of the populous nations of Europe and the political rights of the Bulgarian nation began to be talked about increasingly. Finally, in 1878 at Berlin, an agreement on the political rights of the Bulgars was acknowledged.1

The Bulgarian nationalist movement turned into a national development movement when the Ottoman Empire began to collapse. The reasons for the Bulgarian national development are as follows:

1. Corruption in the Ottoman administration
2. Oppression of the Greek patriarch and assimilation attempts against the Bulgars

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1 Halil İnalci, Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meveslesi, TTK yayını, Ankara (1943), p. 17.
3. Serb and Russian provocation against the Ottoman administration in Bulgaria.³

After the Vienna defeat, continuing battles in the Bulgarian region caused the Ottoman Empire to lose power in there. As a result, there appeared some local opportunist powers that treated the people badly. These were the major factors, which triggered of the Bulgarian nationalistic movements. On the other hand, the Fener district, in Walechia, and the major cities with Greek populations became wealthy by trading and occupied the important positions in the Ottoman administration, and were dreaming of re-establishing the Byzantine Empire during the 18th century. To achieve this, the Greeks did not hesitate to use any opportunity to assimilate other nations which were associated to the Greek Patriarch by the Ottoman Empire concerning religious matters and administration, and the position of the specially privileged Greek people who were working officially for the Ottoman government, plus their intellectual high level and the Greek trade monopoly in Bulgaria⁴, helped them to assimilate the other nations, especially the Bulgarian people.⁵ Greeks occupied nearly all the important tiers in Government in Bulgaria. The priest who captured these governmental positions by bribery defrauded the people of money by all possible means.⁶

In the 1800s, the Fener Patriarch sent a declaration to all Metropolis ordering that Bulgarian church school should be closed and only the books, which were written in Greek, could be studied. After that, religious ceremonies and proselytising in Bulgarian churches were banned. The Bulgars who had been educated in the Greek schools were ashamed of being Bulgarian in those years. To be Bulgarian meant to be rude, of the peasantry and uneducated person. The Bulgars had to submit to the Greeks.

The Bulgars, whom the Greeks had attempted to assimilate into their own culture could only achieve the re-creation of a national identity and a national education system after a great struggle against the Greek religious and economic suppression. At first, this struggle began with the new Bulgarian Bourgeoisie. They formed the new Bulgarian national education system. After that they formed the establishment of the Bulgar Exarchate against the Greek Church.⁷

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⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid.
In this paper I shall try to explain how the Ottoman government responded to the Bulgarian national movement between 1839 and 1870.

**The Emergence of Bulgarian Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire**

Paisi, a monk, was the promoter of Bulgar nationalism among the forgotten and apathetic Bulgarian people. While he was living as a hermit in a monastery on the top of Mount Athos, he came to detest the brutal attitudes of the Greeks towards his own people. Therefore, he decided to write the history of Bulgaria, which showed that they were as noble as the other nations such as Greeks. In his work, called “The History of the Bulgar kings, saints and people”, he tried to extol the glorious days in the past.

Paisi addressing his people; “(...) to know what is known of the deeds of your fathers as all other peoples and nations know about their own nationality and language, have either own history, and proud of their ridiculed and abused other peoples and nationalities. I grew very fond of Bulgarian nation and fatherland and applied much effort to collect various books and histories until I assembled and put together the history of the Bulgarian nation. I have written it for your benefit and pride, for you who like to know about your nation and languages. Copy this little history and pay to have it copied by those who can write and keep it so that it will not perish. There are those who do not care to know about their own Bulgarian nation and turn to foreign ways and foreign tongue; they do not care for their own language but try to read and speak Greek and are ashamed to call themselves Bulgarian. O, you senseless and stupid people! Why are you ashamed to call yourselves Bulgarians and do not read and speak your own language? Or had the Bulgarians no kingdom and state? They have ruled for many years and have exacted tribute from powerful Romans and wise Greeks. Emperors and kings have given them royal daughters as wives in order to have piece and amity with the Bulgarian tsars, they first had a patriarch, they first were converted, and they conquered the largest territory. (....)” 8

After Paisi another priest called Sofroni (1735-1815) played an important role in the awakening movement of Bulgarian nationalism. Sofroni, in his impressive work, mentioned the greediness of Greek priests. He especially wrote about the catastrophies during the time of Pazvantoğlu, who ruled the district illegally because of the weakness of Ottoman central administration in this area. One of the followers of Sofroni was Dr. Petar Beron (1797-1871) who devoted himself to Bulgarian nationalism. This man, whose real name was Petar Haciberovic, attained his first nationalist notions during his childhood in Kazan (Kotel) from Sofroni. In Munich, where he finished his medical education, he set up a new Bulgarian alphabet, which would be used for the new Bulgarian education system. Dr. Petar Beron continued his studies on Bulgarian education

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8 Cited in ibid.
system. The books he wrote were distributed in Bulgaria and were greatly instrumental spreading Bulgarian nationalism.9

One of the students of Sofroni was George Mamarchev who was a revolutionist. According to Mamarchev, in order to separate Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire, armed combat was necessary. Although he tried to start a rebellion in Tarnova at 1835, he was arrested and exiled to an island called Sisam where he died in exile in 1871.10

Another student of Sofroni, a monk called Neofit Hilandarski Bozveli, took an important part in the Bulgarian national movement. Bozveli visited nearly every village and town to make the people conscious of their national ideology. Besides this, he tried to separate the Bulgarian church and schools from Greek Church and schools. Therefore, the Greek patriarch accused him of being a Russian agent. So he was exiled and later died in 1848 while in exile. After Bozveli’s death, his close friend Hillaryon Makariopolski had to continue the struggle on his own. He was also exiled twice because of conflict with the Greek Church. In the meantime he was ex-communicated and exiled to Kütahya. Thereafter he wrote a letter to the Sultan of the time and he was forgiven.11

In addition, some non-Bulgarians also helped the Bulgarian national movement. For example, George Ivanovic Venelin, who originally came from Russia, wrote a book called “The Old and New Bulgars” in which he supported nationalism as well as pan-slavists policies. Eventually, the rich Bulgars who were living both under the Ottoman administration and in the other States set up committees to establish schools which would educated in Bulgarian language in order to awake the nationalist movement amongst the Bulgars living under the Ottoman administration. Apart from this they sent their youngsters to various European cities, especially to Russian schools.12

At that time, a rich Bulgarian trader’s son called Gabrovali Vasil Aprilov, who was deeply effected by Venelin’s call to awake his nation, decided to establish a school which was based on the European model. Aprilov collected money, which was needed, from the traders in Odessa and Bucharest. It is interesting that Aprilov, who was living as a Greek until that time, spent his fortune on these schools. In 1835, in Gabrova, the school was opened with great ceremony. A famous monk,

10  Ibid.
11  Şentürk, Osmanlı Devletinde Bulgar Meselesi, p.58.
12  Ibid.
Neofit Bozveli, who was mentioned above, was appointed as the Principal. The books for the school were published in Serbia. Thus, they started the national Bulgarian education movement, which led to establishing the Bulgarian state. In the first six years, the number of schools was six, which increased to thirteen in the year of 1841. Between 1841-1845 it increased to 53. In 1860, there were 807; in 1870 there were 1217. In short, the Bulgars were bringing up the generation, which was needed to achieve their nationalist movement. After taking educational control from the Greeks, the Bulgars were gaining their own identity quickly.

Although the Ottoman Empire did not like these incidents, it did not want to make difficulties so they stuck to the Tanzimat Ferman. Indeed, it must be kept in mind that the announcement of the Tanzimat reforms encouraged and somewhat aided the Bulgarian nationalist movement. For example, the principles of equal rights for all peoples within the Ottoman Empire was used by the Bulgarian nationalist leaders to support the Bulgarian demands for their own education, church and so on.

Another important effect of the Bulgarian national movement was the creation of missionary schools, especially Robert College that was based in Istanbul. In this school, they educated the most intelligent Bulgarian students. According to an English agent, G. H. Fitzmaurice, if Robert College had not been created, they could never have been a Bulgarian State.
One of the reasons for so much motivation within Bulgarian nationalism was the establishment of reading houses-okuma evleri. Beside this, the magazines and the newspapers, which the Bulgars published, accelerated the call for Bulgarian nationalism.18

The Bulgarian Church Question and the Ottoman Response

In studying the evolution of Bulgarian nationalism, the Bulgarian church question offers one of its most interesting phenomena. As I have already mentioned above, the Bulgars were practically a lost people by the end of the eighteenth century. They had forgotten their history, their literature and so on. In the view of Ahmed Refik, the first step of Bulgarian national awakening was a demand for independence from the Greek Church-Patriarchate in Istanbul. The Ottoman Empire, without making any distinction between race, nationality, or language, classed all Christians as millet-i Rum-Greek people and conferred on the Patriarch of Istanbul an unlimited authority over all orthodox churches and schools which led to the Greek clergy misusing their privileges and power against the non-Greek Christians, including the Bulgars.19

In time, as the nationalist notions began to strengthen in Bulgaria, a small group of native priests was to be found in the Greek Church in Bulgaria, with the monks making up the nucleus of the future teachers of the Bulgarian nationalist movement. For the further development of Bulgarian nationalism, it was necessary to build a number of schools for the education of the younger generation. For this purpose, the monks and the priest who were under the authority of the Greek Church in Bulgaria started the first promotion of Bulgarian nationalist movement, simultaneously with their educational attempts. Now it can be said that the educational and church movement, on the one hand, and the revolutionary movement, on the other, increased in Bulgaria.

The Ottoman central government had proclaimed the 1839 ferman. According to this, all nations living on the Ottoman territories were equal in all forms. This prompted the Bulgars, who were living in Istanbul, to apply to Bab-i ali/ Sublime Porte for setting up their own independent church. Thus the Bulgarian national movement had been started as a church movement in the Ottoman Empire. At the beginning of the Bulgarian church movement, an Ottoman citizen, Stefanaki Bey, who was originally a Bulgar but living as a Greek, applied for a Priest house-Papas evi in Istanbul, in 1848. Stefaniki Bey, in his application mentioned the economic and social contribution of the 50,000 Bulgars living in Istanbul20, giving this as one of the reasons for setting up a Bulgar Priest house:

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18 Ibid.
19 Ahmed Refik, “Fenar Patrikhanesi ve Bulgar Kilisesi”, Türk Tarihi Encümeni Mecmuası, sene xv, sayısı 8 (85), İstanbul (1341), pp. 73-84.
20 Ahmed Refik, “Fenar Patrikhanesi ve Bulgar Kilisesi”, pp. 73-84.
Although the Christian nations who were living in İstanbul had their own church like Greek and Armenians and Jewish, the Bulgars did not have their own church.21

The ceremonies in the Greek orthodox churches, which Bulgars were attending was in the Greek language. So the Bulgars could not understand anything.

On religious days, like Christmas and Easter, as the churches were not big enough, it caused overcrowding.

In order to avoid all these difficulties, they wanted permission to set up a Priest’s house, which would serve all the need of the people in the Fener district of İstanbul. As seen, Stefanaki Bey’s application was for the Bulgars who were living in Istanbul but later on became a nation-wide enterprise, which included all the Bulgarian people in the Ottoman territory. This demand of the Bulgars was appropriate to Tanzimat principles but it was against the Islamic law. Since the conquest of Istanbul, building a new church had been banned. Even for the repairing of Greek, Armenian and Jewish temples a ferman (imperial permission) was needed. Considering all this, the Ottoman Empire allowed Bulgars to build not a church but a priest’s house in Fener. Thus the characteristics of Bulgar exarchate were established and the separation movement from the Greek Church started in October 1849. According to Macdermott this ferma-permission was of historic importance not only because of the church, but also it was the first Turkish document to refer to the Bulgar millet-the Bulgarian people, thus recognising officially a difference between the Bulgars and the Greeks.22 In addition, the crowning success in building the free Bulgarian ‘church’-papazhane at İstanbul, showed the ostensible approval of the Ottoman government towards the movement and tended to foster a community feeling among the Bulgarians as a national group within the Ottoman Empire.23

The Bulgars were determined to establish their own churches. After the declaration of the 1856 ferma, which allowed the nations to re-organise themselves, the church movement extended to the rest of Bulgaria. Now the Bulgars increased their demands. Using the 1856 ferma’s principles, the Bulgars, who were living in Macedonia, demanded native clergy and rejected the authority

of the Greek Church. In addition to this, they also signed a petition in 1858 demanding native bishops. The events in Macedonia were repeated in other parts where Bulgarians lived. Now in Bulgaria the wave of antagonism against the Patriarchate took on a fanatical as well as national aspect. Furthermore, a dramatic incident was enacted when the Bulgarian Bishop Ilarion was forced, amid popular acclaim, to omit the name of Patriarch as he was celebrating an Easter mass on April 1860 in Istanbul. Thus the patriarch ex-communicated Bishop Ilarion. Thereupon the Ottoman central government tried to smooth out the differences between the Greeks and the Bulgarians. Meanwhile, the Bulgars, using the 1856 ferman, set up a committee and sent it to the Sublime Porte in 1860. According to this committee, the Bulgars would not recognize the Greek patriarch any more. That is why Patriarch Kyrinos resigned. While the Bulgars demands were being discussed progress they were also demonstrations in front of the Russian embassy, where hymns were sung for the Russian Tsar.\textsuperscript{24} As seen, the conflict assumed an international importance and the central government’s role as mediators failed.

Meanwhile the Vatican became interested in Bulgarian affairs. Besides this, France and Austria were interested in the church question. Actually, the Bulgarians wanted to preserve the church by placing it under the protection of one of the western powers, for example, France. At the time, the power most interested in the Bulgarian-Greek church dispute was Russia. The Russian ambassador to Istanbul, Count Ignatief, threw himself into the conflict with characteristic energy, now advising patriarch, and threatening the Bulgarian representatives, but always maintaining a dominating attitude. Indeed, the Ottoman government suspected his motives and disliked him for interfering in its domestic affairs. It is clear that for the time being the church question became one of the most important problems of the Ottoman Empire because of both internal and external pressure. For example, when the church conflict first emerged between the Greek patriarch and the Bulgars, English attitude was lukewarm, but in time she changed her policy because of Russian influence in the Balkans. According to Hyde, who used the British ambassador’s words to Istanbul, Sir Henry Balwer, “the Bulgarian church should ally itself with Rome” because he became aware of Russian plans for strengthening her influence in the Ottoman Balkan Peninsula.\textsuperscript{25}

Now let me turn back to the resignation issue. As said before, after the patriarch Kyrinos’ resignation, the Bulgarian religious delegations did not attend the new patriarch election, and they refused to recognize the new Patriarch. Therefore, the separation from the Greek Church became inevitable. As for the church the Bulgars were planning to establish, they needed political protection from any of the European powers. In order to establish the Bulgarian national church they decided to unite with the Roman Catholic Church. Towards the late 1860, a fully authorized committee, which was led by a Bulgar bishop, was sent.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Heyd, \textit{History of Bulgaria}, p. 23.
to the Armenian Catholic Patriarch.\(^{26}\) The Armenian Patriarch, on behalf of the Pope, guaranteed that the Pope would not interfere with Bulgarian religious matters and the regulations between Rome and Bulgarian Church would be the same as relations between Rome and the other Eastern Churches. Thereafter, another Bulgarian committee negotiated with the Armenian Church and they presented a petition with many signatories, which were concerned with the unification with the Armenian Catholic Church. According to the petition, unification was necessary in order to re-establish the Bulgarian national church, which had been established in the past but abolished by the Greek Patriarch. The reason why the Bulgars changed their school of thought (mezhep) was obviously political rather than religious. However, the negotiations between the Greek Church and the Bulgars did not finish positively.\(^{27}\)

In 1867, the Russian ambassador to Istanbul, Ignatief, persuaded the Greek Patriarch to call a council and to consider the Bulgarian demands, but the council was made up of Greeks who not compromise. Thereupon another council was called to settle the Bulgarian-Greek problem. But the Bulgarian leader did not want to solve the problem under the Greek patriarchy any more. However, the Ottoman government tried sort the problem out in a peaceful way between the two factions, she did not succeed. The Ottoman government was sorry for the Russian ambassador. Indeed she mistrusted Ignatieff’s attitude towards the Ottoman domestic problem. Thus the central government changed its policy and wanted to end this long and somewhat harmful struggle. But before the last attempt, it tried to reconcile the two factions without Russian interference. For this purpose, two new plans were presented to the Patriarch in 1868 but these plans also did not succeed.\(^{28}\)

As previously mentioned, until 1868 the Ottoman government tried to solve the Bulgarian Church problem within the Greek Patriarchate. After the 1868 Bulgarian uprising against the central government, it was decided to put an end to this problem once and for all. On March 18, 1870 a ferman was issued, declaring that all the religious affairs of the Bulgar community were to be re-regulated. This ferman authorised the creation of a free Bulgarian Church to which the name of...


\(^{28}\) Ibid.
Exarchate was given. After the establishment of the free Bulgarian Church in Istanbul, the Bulgarian national movement proceeded to a new era and the political independence was accelerated.

In short, the Ottoman government did not follow a consistent policy on the church question. At the beginning, she tried to solve the problem within the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul. For this purpose sometimes she played a mediator role. But in time, the European powers, especially the Russian ambassador, Ignatieff’s influence on the church problem, made a significant effect in the changing Ottoman policy. In addition to this, perhaps, the Ottoman government thought that, if permission were given, the Bulgarian national movement would be satisfied. Thus she achieves the division of Orthodox Christianity, and she would survive herself in the Balkans as long as she could.

**The Bulgarian Uprising and the Ottoman Response**

The Ottoman central government saw the beginnings of the Bulgarian revolt shortly after the proclamation of the 1839 ferman, which formerly marked the initiation of the Tanzimat policy. According to which, the Ottoman policy, during the reformation period, had, as one of its stated aims, the amelioration of certain conditions to reduce the discontent on the part of non-Muslim subject of the Empire. At that time, the general causes of these revolts were rates of taxation and depredation of the local Turks, who were practising widespread banditry, and thus the considerably weakening the Ottoman Empire’s authority in Bulgaria. According to Blanqui, who was one of the contemporary observers who had been sent to survey the Nish area immediately after the suppression of the revolt by the French government, there was a definite connection between the Tanzimat and the revolt. He also added that the main causes of the revolt were to be sought in problems of taxation and the failure of reform. Indeed, in Tanzimat reforms, Mültezims were to be replaced by a single tax collected directly by the government through new officials, named Muhassils. The implementation of this reform suffered greatly from the fact that when the new posts were created, the older category was not abolished. So the collection of taxes by the Muhassils moreover

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29 Ibid.
31 In the Tanzimat period Bulgaria was under İltizam except for a few brief episodes of direct collection by central authority. Mültezim, tax-farmer, buy the taxes of a district for a year that the system known as İltizam. For further information on this see İnalçik, *Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi*. 
produced new abuses. In Pinson’s view, there occurred co-operation between the Muhassils and the officials.\footnote{İnalçık, 	extit{Bulgar Meselesi}, p. 27; Pinson, “Ottoman Bulgaria”, pp. 105-106.} As a result of these difficulties, a meeting attended by over 600 families of villagers in the area took a decision to revolt. The leader of the revolt was Milyo. The situation was very explosive, in that the rising spread from Nish to Vidin in a very short period of time. Actually, there was not enough Ottoman military force to use against the rebels. In this case, it was necessary to make certain decisions about the revolt because of the absence of sufficient regular troops. Thus the governor of Nish, Sabri Mustafa Pasha, called up some 1500 Albanian irregulars who caused great havoc, greatly complicating the pacification process.\footnote{Pinson, “Ottoman Bulgaria”, p. 107.} When the central government got news about the Albanians’ attitude towards citizenry, immediate action was taken and Yakup Pasha, who was governor of Edirne, was sent to Bulgaria to bring the Albanians under control. In a very short time, the Albanian forces had been under control and the former situation was restored. After that, Sabri Mustafa Pasha was accused as the chief culprit of ill-treatment of the locals and was removed to Istanbul.\footnote{İnalçık, 	extit{Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi}, p. 31; Pinson, “Ottoman Bulgaria”, p.107.}

After the Nish uprising the condition of Bulgaria went from bad to worse. The Nish revolt had produced very little change. Indeed, Bulgaria was occupying an exceptional position in the Ottoman Empire because its proximity to Istanbul. The Ottoman government made several attempts to improve provincial administration, such as the assembly of provincial notables (1845), a collection of provincial meclises which consisted of Muslim notables, and officials, and of prominent non-Muslims, generally the local heads of the millets. None of these measures appear to have produced any significant changes and the main causes of the revolt remained in place.\footnote{İbíd.}

In 1850, a new revolt was seen in Vidin and Lom. The rebels cut the major roads to disrupt Turkish communication, military movement and provisioning. The central government was very anxious that the uprising might stretch to rest of the Bulgaria.\footnote{Pars Tuğlaci, 	extit{Bulgaristan ve Türk-Bulgar İlişkileri}, (İstanbul 1984), p. 60.} The situation was very delicate. Therefore, a special council was set up to deal with the revolt. Meanwhile, Ali Riza Pasha was sent out from Istanbul to put down the revolt, without force if possible, but if this failed, then he was to use regular forces i.e. 	extit{kuvve-i nizamiye}.\footnote{İnalçık, 	extit{Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi}, p. 55.} However, before the regular forces arrived, the local notables went into action and put the rebels down.\footnote{İnalçık, 	extit{Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi}, p. 57; Pinson, “Ottoman Bulgaria”, p.124.}

According to rebels’ declaration, neither the Nish nor the Vidin uprising were nationalistic or against the central government: “...our troubles are due to the
tax farmers, village landlords, constables and suchlike...” 39 But in time the situation changed in favour of the Bulgarian national movement because of this failure of the Tanzimat reforms. As it has been said before, the main aim of the Tanzimat reforms in Bulgaria was to make the people satisfied and thus to maintain the Empire in this area as long as it could be. In other words, the Ottoman government’s policy towards Bulgarian affairs was to make the necessary concessions to “raya power” without eliminating Ottoman authority or to channel the Bulgarian demands in a direction not harmful to the Empire. This was the Ottoman government’s main policy to all Bulgarian demands concerning education, church question and so on. For these purpose; she tried from time to time, to make some amelioration in Bulgaria. However, the tax problems could not solved for a long time, perhaps, not until the end of the Ottoman sovereignty because, as mentioned above, of the implementation of the new tax system itself created conflict. To solve this problem, the government sent special directions to the governors and officials to treat the people well but they could not avoid the oppression of local Ağas and Kocabaşıs.

In April, 1856, a new rebellion began in Bulgaria. After a short time it spread to Timova and Nish. The Ottoman government, with the intention of not letting others interfere, sent meclis-i vala katib-i sanisi Mithad Efendi (Pasha) to the rebellion region with extraordinary powers. Mithad Pasha found out that the misadministration by the Silistre governor, Mirza Said Pasha, had caused the rebellions, and he dismissed the governor. Thus it was seen that the general causes of the rebellions was the oppression by either local notables or government officers. Shortly after Midhat Pasha arrived, he ended this anarchy but it was not a permanent solution because the real reason for the rebellion was the existence of the köy corbacıları who were demanding illegal money and labour from the people. Due to the people’s common and widespread dissatisfaction of the people after the 1856 Bulgarian rebellion, Midhad Efendi (Pasha) was sent to Timova in 1857 and he regulated a new nizamname which defined the state of Çorbacis 40. According to this:

39 Ibid.
40 Çorbacı was the man who traded. Köy kocabaşıları who was elected from köy corbacıları once a year was helping the government with collecting the tax. Before Tanzimat ferman, every village had only one kocabaşı but after Tanzimat every village had three or five kocabaşı relatively wity its population. These people set up the village committees (köy meclisleri). These committees were regulating the relations between government and non-muslims and sometimes they solved the problems between the villagers. Villages were represented by köy kocabaşısı and the region were represented by memleket çorbacısı who was also called “knez” or “baş knez” on this see Şentürk, Bulgar Meseleri, pp.111-132. Cf. Mercia Macdermott, A History of Bulgaria, 1393-1885, Allen & Unwin, London, 1962.
No one could demand any money under different names.

No one was expected to work as angarya.

Village kocabaşı could be appointed for one year and only after two years he would be re-elected.41

As it is said, before the implementation of the new regulations, the main aim was to keep the people happy so that the Ottoman interests would be maintained in this region. But all the positive efforts on behalf of the Ottoman government could not avoid the rebel movements, in other words the nationalist movement in Bulgaria. For the time being, the Bulgarian nationalist movement was increasing and the problem for the central government became more pressing.

In May 1860, the foreign interference became inevitable. The Ottoman government did not want foreign interference in her domestic affairs. Thus an Ottoman committee, including non-Muslim representative, led by Sadriazam Kibrisli Mehmed Pasha, was sent to Bulgaria to inspect the region.42 After a three-month inspection, the Sadriazam decided to appoint a very qualified person to Bulgaria in order to look after Ottoman benefits. So the Sultan sent meclis-i vala baş katibi Mithad Pasha, who had worked in the region very successfully, as governor to Nish (February 1861).43 At that time, the main issue in the region was security. Banditry was rife across the whole country. Mithad Pasha negotiated with Muslim and non-Muslim representatives. He examined the problems and the solutions. Firstly he gained the support of the people to solve the security problem. He created a convenient environment in which to practise his plans. In a short time, he built roads, bridges and irrigation channels. In addition to this, he founded a mail company between Nish and İstanbul. As a result of these good works he became very popular. For the first time in the Ottoman Empire he firmly a foundation, which was called “menafi-i umumiye sandıkları” in Nish in 1863.44

During his governorship, Mithat Pasha gave equal opportunities to both Muslim and non-Muslims. Again for the first time in Ottoman history he founded...

41 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
the “İslahhane” which is the origin of industry schools. Mithat Pasha made the region safe within less than three years.45

The Ottoman statesmen wanted to spread these good works all over Bulgaria and get rid of external interference so they founded Tuna vilayeti, which centred in Ruscuk. Silistre, Nish and Vidin were in the same Vilayet.46 Mithat Pasha was appointed to the newly established Tuna vilayeti. During his time of office, Mithat Pasha built 3000 km of roads, 1420 bridges and a railway between Ruscuk and Varna. Mithat Pasha spread the “menafi-i umumiye sandıklar” a all over Bulgaria, which was the origin of Ziraat Bankası in Turkey. As well as this, he founded similar “İslahhanes” in Ruscuk and Sofia. In these schools, it was state policy to teach Muslim, non-Muslims indeed all students, that there part of the Ottoman Empire (Ottomanism-Osmanlıcılık)47 in order to avoid the subject of Bulgarian nationalism. In addition to this, he established the first publishing house in Ruscuk in order to avoid the influence of Russian and Serbian agents. They printed the “Tuna” paper, which addressed both Muslims and non-Muslims.48


Vilayeti, in other words, Bulgaria, was re-developed by every means possible, and it became a modern state in Europe, which was ruled by Mithat Pasha.

In 1868, Mithat Pasha was appointed to the “Şuray-i Devlet Reisiği”. Just after his appointment, a new rebellion occurred in Bulgaria. So Mithat Pasha was sent back to suppress the rebellion, but the nationalistic movement could never be suppressed.49 Now, if we have a look at the works which Mithat Pasha did, we can obviously see the Ottoman response to Bulgarian nationalism. On the other hand, she tried to develop rest of the Bulgaria as much as could be, but suppressed any possible nationalistic movement using regular forces on the other.

In this stage, I will look at the 1868 Bulgarian Revolution and the Ottoman response to these improvements.

**1868 Bulgarian Revolution and The Ottoman Response**

As explained above, according to Government policy, Midhad Pasha, as one of the best qualified statesmen of the time, had been sent to Bulgaria. During the period of nationalist development in the Balkans and especially in Bulgaria, the Ottoman statesmen asked themselves the question what could they do for the continuation of the Empire in Bulgaria despite all the nationalist movements and external interference. The only thing to be done was to protect the Empire by a number of reforms, such as abolishing angarya, Gospodarlık regime; creation of a provincial assembly and so on. Thus the condition of the Bulgarian people would be improved and the people would be kept away from the nationalist movements. But all these positive thoughts could not bring about any significant change in the Bulgarian society. In contract with these, according to İnalçık50, at the time the central government made lots of promises for the amelioration of the conditions in the Bulgaria, and all these promises created high hopes among the non-Muslim subject, especially the Bulgarian people. But in time it became apparent that the government could not afford what she promised. The people were disappointed. Therefore, because it seemed that no hope remained, people who had not previously been politically active began to join the nationalist movements.

Midhat Pasha re-established security by his successful strategies but as mentioned above, after he was appointed from “Tuna vilayet” governor to “şuray-i devlet reisiği”. According to Ahmed Refik51 gangs of about 30-40 people crossed

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the river Danube from “memleketeyn” (Eflak-Boğdan) side and began to march towards the village Karaisa. The revolutionary groups, who were led by Haci Dimitri, were trained, carried modern arms and in wore military uniform, whereas the former groups were just ordinary average men. Wherever they went, they gave out leaflets on behalf of “Balkan muvakkat hükümeti” and encouraged the people to rebel for sake of Bulgarian independence. They promised to rescue both Muslim and non-Muslims from oppression and invited them to co-operate. In addition to this, the leaflets, which were distributed by these rebels, included a Bulgarian national anthem. Apparently this movement was quite different from the other rebellions.

Besides this, we learn of the real intention of these rebels from the letters, which we got from the dead rebels. According to these letters, the rebels demanded that the Ottoman sultan recognise the Bulgarian independence. After mentioning the unjust treatment that the Bulgars had to face and the difficulties they had been through, they clearly expressed that they would continue to fight for independence. And for this purpose, they would encourage all the people to rebellion.52

Considering all this, the intention of these rebellions was to establish a national and independent Bulgarian state. Meanwhile external forces helped rebels continuously. The conflict was becoming more intense and spreading all over Bulgaria. At the time, the Ottomans were having difficulties in Eflak-Bogdan, Serbia and Gritte. On the other hand, the conflict in Bulgaria caused the Ottomans to focus on the Bulgarian rebellion. As we mentioned before, Bulgaria was too close to Istanbul, indeed, it was the capital of Ottoman sovereignty in the Balkans.

As the rebellion began to spread, Bab-ı Âli appointed “Şuray-i Devlet reisi” Midhat Pasha who recently served successfully in this region to suppress the rebellion before it spread to the other parts of Bulgaria and other states might interfere. The appointment of Midhat Pasha was significant proof of the importance the Ottomans gave to Bulgaria. Midhat Pasha suppressed the rebellion within twenty days and re-established security but as he did not believe this was sufficient and he gave a report to Bab-ı Âli for further improvements. After that, the rebellion movement could not be controlled and the Ottomans had to use force against the rebels.53

52  Ibid.
Conclusion

During this paper I have tried to explain in particular the Ottoman response to the Bulgarian nationalism movement. The first stage of Bulgarian nationalism was started with liberation of Bulgarian people from the Greek Patriarchate who were living in Istanbul. But later on it became nation-wide and included all the Bulgarian people in the Ottoman Empire. The first response of the Ottoman government to the Bulgarian demands was lukewarm. In the eyes of the Ottoman government, it was a religious problem rather than a political one. Thus it should be solved within the Greek Patriarchate. But, in time, the Ottoman government had to change their policy towards the Church question because of Bulgarian demands and gave her permission of the autonomy of the Bulgarian Church from the Greek Patriarchate, in 1870.

Indeed, the first aim of the Bulgarian nationalist movement leaders was to increase Bulgarian national education and cultural revival movement simultaneously with their religious liberation movement from the Greek Patriarchate. For this purpose, using the Tanzimat principles, a number of schools were established in Bulgaria in a very short period of time. The Ottoman central government kept a close watch on the Bulgarian education movement in order to be prepared for future developments. Firstly, the government tried to get Bulgarian education under her control with the establishment of a number of schools in which all the students, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, were taught “Ottomanism” as a state policy in order to avoid the idea of Bulgarian nationalist movement. Besides this, the Ottoman government tried to increase prosperity among the Bulgarian people. For this purpose, one of the best of the Ottoman statesmen, Midhat Pasha, was appointed governor to the newly established of the Tuna Vilayeti, in other word Bulgaria. During his office he tried to improve conditions in order to cut off the advance of nationalism. In short, the Ottoman response to the Bulgarian affairs was to make the necessary concessions to Bulgarian people without eliminating Ottoman authority or to channel the Bulgarian demands in a direction not harmful to the Empire. In this respect, it can be said that the Ottoman governments’ attitude towards the Bulgarian nationalist movement was not consistent.54

54 On the Ottoman policy towards the Balkan peninsula in general for the later period, see Süleyman Demirci, “The Methods Employed by the Unionists in Power to Control People of the Ottoman Balkan Peninsula”, Journal of Institute of Social Sciences / Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 21, 2006/2:467-480
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