

THE BALKAN POLITICS OF “COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS” IN 1908-1913

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Abstract

The first places where the Ottoman Empire began to lose territories were the Balkans. In addition, the loss of the Balkans, the gateway to the West, meant the disposal of a region of special significance. The loss of Rumelia had caused a great negative impact on every part of the Ottoman Empire. This negative effect was exacerbated by the fact that the Muslim population, who had been living there for 500 years, were forced to immigrate to Anatolia in masses. The loss of the Balkans should not only be considered as a loss of land but as the unravelling of the Ottoman Empire, and the loss of glory for the empire that lost its lands against the West. Further, it was the dissolution of the Ottoman ideology for the Committee of Union and Progress. As a result of the disloyalty faced by the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, the Turkish nationalists gained a reactive strength in a swift manner and became widespread. Because of the influence and patronage of the West in the nationalization of the non-Muslim people in the Balkans, Committee of Union and Progress also played an active role in the removal of the un-Islamic elements in Anatolia.

Keywords: Balkans, Committee of Union and Progress, the Ottoman Empire

1908-1913 İTTİHAT VE TERAKKİ CEMİYETİNİN BALKAN POLİTİKASI

Öz

Osmanlı'nın toprak kaybetmeye başladığı ilk yerler Balkanlardır. Ayrıca İmparatorluğun Batı'ya açılan kapısıdır. Kaybedilmesi de özellikle çok özel anlam taşıyan bir coğrafyadır. Rumelinin kaybı Osmanlı içerisinde her kesimde büyük olumsuz etki meydana getirmiştir. Bu olumsuz etkiyi daha da ağırlaştıran yaklaşık 500 yıldır buralarda yerleşik bulunan Müslüman halkın kitleler halinde Anadolu'ya göç etmek zorunda kalmış olmalarıdır. Balkanların kaybı sadece toprak kaybı olarak düşünülmemeli, Osmanlı'nın çözülmesi, Batı'ya karşı topraklarını kaybeden imparatorluğun ihtişamını kaybetmeye başlaması ayrıca İttihat ve Terakki için de Osmancılık görüşünün de sonu olmuştur. Balkanlardaki Osmancılığın gördüğü bu vefasızlığa karşılık Türk milliyetçiliği bir tepki hareketi olarak güç kazanmış ve yaygınlaşmıştır. Balkanlardaki Müslüman olmayan halkların devletleşmesinde Batı'nın etkisi ve himayesinde olmasından dolayı, İttihat ve Terakki de Anadolu'daki Müslüman olmayan unsurları tasfiye etmesinde etkin rol olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Balkanlar, İttihat ve Teraki, Osmanlı Terak

1 – Introduction

The geographical name Rumelia, given by the Ottomans for the Balkan Peninsula, was also the name for the Ottoman state that surrounded this region. The widest boundaries of Rumelia were the Black Sea in the east, the Adriatic Sea in the west, the Vienna gates in the north and the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas in the south. Since the regions such as Wallachia, Moldavia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and Mora were included within these boundaries they were referred to with their own names thus the Rumelia expression was given to the places remaining out of these regions upon the progress of the Ottomans. The places, which were called Rumelia, cover the Eastern Thrace, Macedonia, Thessalia, Mora Peninsula, Skopje, Janina, Thessaloniki, Monastery and Edirne provinces.

The Ottoman Empire gained a Balkan country appearance following the Rumelia conquest within the 15th century. The Ottoman Empire obtained its economic power and human capital considerably from the Balkans until the Balkan Wars. The Balkans were the backbone of the Ottoman Empire. The indulgence specific to empires introduced peace for many years in the Balkans and such a colorful geography inculcated various ethnical factors into living together under the roof of the empire.

The Balkans became the center of the rebellions due to the development of the sense of being a nation starting from the 19th century. The process, which started with the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-1878, known as the '93 War, and ended with the Balkan Wars, caused the Western flank of the Ottoman Empire to collapse entirely. Hereinafter, the Ottoman Empire ceased to be a Balkan country and accordingly a European country and was cloaked in the guise of a Middle East country. The region that increased the general literacy level of the Ottoman Empire had always started to develop and gain strength in the Balkans. The foundations of the Young Turk revolution would be laid in the Balkans.

The Young Turk Revolution in 1908 ended the long period of the autocracy of Abdulhamit II. and accompanied the political, cultural and social regulations. The Committee of Union and Progress had been controlling the destiny of the country until the year of 1918 and had been directing its external policy following its power grab after the revolution of 1908. While causing the continuity of the soil losses in particular, the unionists could not solve the problems of the state by re-enacting the constitutional monarchy. The revolution did not prevent the rapid diminishing of the boundaries of the state. Bulgaria declared its independence and Austria annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina within one year following the declaration of the Second Constitutional Era. The Balkan States (Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, and Bulgaria), which formed an alliance as a result of the wrong policies followed by the unionists in the Balkans and the provocations of Russia, declared war against the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the First and Second Balkan Wars, the Ottoman Empire left its entire sovereignty area in Europe to the Balkan States, excluding the Rumelia hinterland of Istanbul. The Balkan Wars were the beginning of the end of the Ottoman Empire.

2 – Historical Infrastructure for the Ottoman in the Balkans

The arrival of the Ottoman Empire to the Balkan Peninsula in 1354 marked an essential turning point in the history of the region because the "Pax-Ottomana" (Ottoman Peace) era started in the region after that date. In this era, which characterizes the powerful periods of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans achieved peace and welfare to an extent that could not be compared to the previous eras in economic, political and administrative terms. For instance, the Balkan villagers were at a considerably advanced level in terms of economic welfare when compared to their European fellows until the 17th century. However, this period of peace started to be disturbed due to the languorousness of the Ottoman Empire, the distortion of the economic, administrative and soil system and the long-lasting wars as of the 18th century. In addition to this, the reasons such as the expansion of the French Nationalism movements in the region, the interest accounting of states such as Austria, France, England, and mainly Russia in the region, and consequently the provocation of the local people by them, demolished the peace and welfare environment established in the region so not to be ameliorated.

The heaviest impact to the presence of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans after the Serbian and Greek riots was caused after the Ottoman-Russia War of 1878. With the Berlin Treaty which was signed at the end of the war, the Ottoman Empire lost all of its soils except for Thrace and Macedonia. Although Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria continued to be legally deemed as Ottoman soil until the year of 1908, Bosnia-Herzegovina was lost in 1908 and then Bulgaria was completely lost one year after. After the Balkan Wars, which occurred within the years of 1912-1913, the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire and in the following the boundaries of the Republic of Turkey in the Balkans were determined in its final state. Thus, a narrow region which encloses Edirne and Kırklareli, called the Eastern Thrace, remained within the Turkish boundaries. However, the consequences of the Balkan Wars were not only calamitous for the Turks but also caused disagreements and hostilities between the Balkan states and people, the effects of which have continued so far today.

That the Balkan states desired to fill the gap remaining from the Ottoman Empire for merely political and strategic purposes without considering the ethnical, religious, cultural and historical conditions in the region caused the mentioned calamitous consequences. The ethnical, religious and cultural conflicts existing in the region became chronic and constituted the largest obstacle in front of the Balkans' gaining stability. The center of the political dispute between the Balkan states was composed issue of sharing Macedonia. Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania desired to expand even at the expense of each other. For instance, whereas the Bulgarians desired to have all of Macedonia, which was shared between three states, Serbia desired to have Thessalonica which was owned by Greece. With the Bucharest Treaty which was signed after the Second Balkans, requiring new drawing, the map of the Balkans was drawn up again and left many social problems such as minority and migration issues as well as many political and boundary issues unsettled.

Under these circumstances, the First World War broke out in this region with the induction of the existing political and social instability environment in the Balkans. Upon the end of the war, the boundaries in the Balkans changed again. Thus, the existing political, geographical and ethnical disunity in the Balkans became much more entrenched. Whereas Romania took Dobruca from Bulgaria and Transylvania from Hungary, defeated Bulgaria had to leave Gumulcine and Dedeagac to Greece and some of its soils in Macedonia to Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavia state was founded on the independent soils of Serbia and Montenegro with a part of the soils of Austria-Hungary Empire which fell apart after the First World War. Thus, whereas Bulgaria was reduced to a small state by disconnecting it from the Aegean Sea, Romania considerably expanded its soils. This, however, consequently caused new problems in addition to the existing ethical, minority and boundary problems in the Balkans.

Within the years following the First World War, the Balkan states were dealing with boundary issues and external issues such as the pressures of the European States on one hand and were struggling with the internal issues such as economic problems and power struggles on the other hand. Turkey, however, completed its national struggle with the Lausanne Peace Treaty within this period. Turkey sat down to the peace table together with its Balkan neighbours in Lausanne. Thus, Turkey ended the war case with the Balkan countries at the opposite block with the Ottoman Empire excluding Bulgaria. However, with the signature of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, Turkey could not completely settle its problems with its Balkan neighbours. The settlement of these problems, which were based on a long historical past, was difficult and inconvenient and would require a long process.¹

2.1 – 1908-1918 A Brief Overview of Ottoman Balkan Policy

The most important feature seen in the activities of this period is that the cadres who govern the state were not aware of the most important balance calculations in the state and between its closest neighbours. During the Turco-Italian War, those who left the region unprepared with senseless approaches, ignored the reports from the consulates in the Balkans regarding the preparations to act together. The government helped to resolve the conflict personally by solving the churches dispute, the biggest obstacle to the Balkan nations' alliance. Russia was trying to establish their Pan-Slavism plan that came forth from the period of Abdulhamit II. Due to the Slavic elements in the Balkans, they were assured that even if they would lose the war they would not have to give up on anything and the status quo would be preserved.² Now, if we look at the agreements made between the Balkan states in this period, we can understand the views of the Balkan states in this period better.

3 – How was the first Committee of Union and Progress established?

¹ Mustafa Sitki Bilgin, "Atatürk Döneminde Türkiye'nin Balkan Diplomasisi (1923-1930)", *Journal of Atatürk Research Center* XX/60 (2004)

² *Committee Osmanlı Ansiklopedisi: Tarih, Medeniyet, Kültür*, ed: Ahmet Turan Alkan (İstanbul: Ağaç Yayınları, 1993), 114-115.

The foundation of this secret society was founded on June 4, 1889 (21 May 1305) at the Military Medical School in Gulhane Park in Istanbul, one hour after the meeting. The founders of the committee were these five medical students: Hikmet Emin from Konya, Arapkırlı Abdullah Cevdet, Ishaq Sukuti from Diyarbakır, Ohrılı İbrahim Ethem (Temo) and Mehmet Reshid the Caucasian. These friends have been involved in investigating the deeds of the inadequate administration for over a year. The purpose of the committee was: Firstly, to explain to the public that the government's policy was perishing the state. The Sultan was the main responsible and the people around him were aiding and abetting him. Secondly, to sacrifice everything to save the homeland and the nation from dangers.

For this reason, they had sworn to each other and decided to register the members secretly on condition that they would swear. The number of members of the community, who had a bash at civilian and military schools, continents, military circles and self-employed occupation, had exceeded one hundred in two years. Upon this, the administrative was formed and the committee was technical and divided into branches. The number of the members assigned to the branches is given in that branch. For example, 121/11 meant number 11 of the 121st branch. The member recognized the person he will receive and his guide, who took him to the community, and the help is regularly collected from this channel.

In 1893 (1309) the number of members of the community reached 900. The committee had spread everywhere in Istanbul and even religious functionaries had been recruited as members. Branches have been established in private schools and even in khanqahs. In medical school, obvious conversations and speeches were possible. However, some mistrustful people in the medical school were able to enter this committee, which was busy with the duty of guidance of the people. They (the mistrusts) reported the existence of the committee, disseminated many secret writings, and that the committee would soon plot mischief. The ninth grade was being raided down. Many books and documents had been seized. As defendant, nine students were arrested and sent to the war court. They were suspended and sentenced to imprisonment. Among them were Abdullah Cevdet and Mehmet Reshid, founders of the committee. Abdulhamit II. did not believe that these actions of school children would be serious. And after a few months of imprisonment, he pardoned these students but appointed Zeki Pasha instead of Said Pasha, the free-minded minister of medicine. At that moment the pressure and the spying were increasing gradually for a year.

As a matter of natural law, while the pressure was increasing, it turned into strength. In 1894 (1310) the committee started to operate. They decided to make publications in Europe and recruited those who had fled before. Three medical students escaped to Europe. Among them was Nazım, who had been engaged to take Ahmet Rıza Bey into the committee. Ahmet Rıza Bey accepted this proposal, however, he offered to call the

committee "the Ottoman Union and Progress Committee." The center in Istanbul also accepted this proposal. Thus, the Ottoman Union Committee had its new name.³

3.1 – Balkan Organization of Committee of Union and Progress

Another important development in the period we examined was the Balkan organization and its activities, which were established with the efforts of Ibrahim Temo. When Ibrahim Temo learned about his sentence, he escaped to Romania with the help of Romanian friends and arrived there on the first November 1895. Thereby, a person who played one of the important roles in the foundation of the society had reached the Balkans. As a result of Temo's activities, branches had been established in Romania as well as other branches in other Balkan cities. The branch in Romania had had little importance at that time compared to others.

The branch in Romania took shape in 1896 when attended by Crimzade Ali Rıza Bey, who escaped to Romania after Temo in 1896 together with Istanbul Dar-ul-Muallim graduate Huseyin Avni Efendi, Osman-Fakih's Sheikh Shevki Efendi and Mahmut Celebi of Köstenceli, who had been in Paris for some time.

With the help of Shefik Bey and Alfred Rustem Bey, who were Ottoman officers first, but close to the ideas of Young Turks, they had published a booklet named Hareket (movement). The booklet's content dealt with the losses under the rule of Abdulhamit II from the "War of 93" onwards. This booklet was welcomed with great interest both in the Balkans and by other Young Turk opponents.

As a result of Temo's contact, it was decided to establish a central branch in Bulgaria in the days near the escape of Murad Bey from Istanbul. In the official letter addressed to Murad Bey by the Bulgarian branch we see that the following expression is used; "(...) you established our branch before your escape from Istanbul. In other words, when you dragged your elbow at the Russian school's benches and were thinking about the freedom of Islam and the felicity of the Ottoman as we might have been thinking earlier about freedom and felicity of our nation..."

In addition to Ruse, which was the center, branches and supporters were organized in Varna, Shumen, Sliven, Yambol, Plovdiv and Vidin. The widespread establishment in Bulgaria and the increase in activity made the Ottoman administration very anxious. These groups were directly in touch with Temo. People working in this organization knew that there was a European center; however, they accepted the first founder of the committee as the local leader.

The leaders of this organization went on regional trips to provide publicity and newspaper subscribers. On the rise of anti-government publications in the region, the administration had made an effort to prevent them. The measures were so concentrated that officials decided to ban all newspapers originating from Bulgaria. But the government

³ Kazım Karabekir, *İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti 1896-1909*, (İstanbul: Emre Yayınları, 1993), 465-467.

had had to warn that only certain articles were banned, or that all publications were not prohibited.

The organization was not only in contact with the Balkan committees, but also participated in meetings held by them, and provided them with speeches in favour of Young Turks, which led to the great haste of the Ottoman administration. This development of the Balkan organization continued even after 1897. However, the correspondence of the organization with the European center had been stronger since this date.

4 – Important Events of the Period

4.1 – Announcement of Second Constitutional Monarchy

On July 23, 1908, the Second Constitutional Monarchy was declared. Those who believed that the constitutional monarchy would take care of everything had imposed the Constitution of 1876.

A non-scheduled and non-programmable motion was made. The state was in its order and structure. Ottoman history was seen as the current.

Mr. Ali Fethi: "Yeah; He put so much work into this and even blood had been shed, in comparison to other countries, but first of all, we have declared the constitutionalism which was adopted as a remedy for salvation from thousand problems of the homeland." And he adds, "While he was wondering what Istanbul would say, the Inspector General Huseyin Hilmi Pasha specifically called for the magnanimous Refik, whom he knew was the Head of the Union and Progress Committee of Thessaloniki.

Sultan Hamidin announced the same decision as us, when we pasted the first declarations on the streets and declared the center as the constitution of the region through telegraphy. At that moment Enver, Mustafa Kemal, Cemal, Kazim Karabekir and other friends, with whom we were together and who would in the future have a say in the destiny of the motherland, took a deep breath." But, somehow, we do not see Mustafa Kemal in a meeting held a day later.

It is obvious that they were running away from Mustafa Kemal out of jealousy because of his real love. Ali Okyar said for their own meeting: "The next day, with the participation of Mithat Shukru, Talât, Cavit, Rahmi and Tahsin we discussed the path of Union and Progress.

We decided to send Talât Bey, Cavit Bey, Rahmi Bey, Cemal Bey, Hafız Hakkı Bey to Istanbul. Talât made this offer:

"The society should take responsibility. We must now officially take the stage as a political presence representing the credibility of the people. Firstly, let us say that the center of the community is Thessaloniki and all the communications will be done with

this center and the directives will be given only from the center. Let us inform the government that we are the addressees."

At this time, Thessaloniki cheers with the humbles of liberty. There's a festive mood. The constitutional monarchy is thought to be celebrated. But there was a hesitation for later on. Indeed, the leaders of the Union and Progress were hesitating. On the one hand, the outburst of young officers who had contributed to the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy, on the other hand, the astonishment brought on by the easy profits, wiped away the discipline in the army.

"Neither the Committee of Union and Progress nor the officers were unable to pass on to the League. The headquarters lost the initiative. Talat Pasha one day told us: "Honestly, I am surprised too. We are waiting for the dust to settle.."

Professor Sadi Irmak said: "Union and Progress did not take power first but chose to stay in an irresponsible situation through the central office and to act behind the scenes. This point was against Mustafa Kemal's directions. He had recommended two things to the Unionists: 1. The army must withdraw from politics. 2. The party should take the responsibility of the government."

In fact, it is obvious that the Union and Progress, after the revolution, had no preparation, and no program. They only gathered around the idea of the "Ottomanism idea" but were considering the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy. Thus, Cemal Pasha said: "The internal political program of the Committee of Union and Progress, which was formed in Thessaloniki, was the return of Mithat Pasha's legal basis. The basis of this law is the application of the principles of the Ottoman Administration community and extension graduation in Ottoman property." In his memoirs, he said: „I would like to inform the ones that accused us of doing Turkish politics, in a tone of finality, that we did not do Turkish politics but the politics of the Ottoman society.“

Feroz Ahmad, an Indian writer, said his valuable research: "Although it appears as the strongest group of the society, it does not automatically guarantee the monopoly of political power." He adds, "The League, which was not a monolithic political organization, could not win its seemingly unified totality due to its own functionalities and conflicts, and thus could not claim power."

"The situation showed that the community could pass immediately to power. The sovereign's traditional authority collapsed, while the Union and Progress had a mystique, a characteristic of secret societies, its reputation had been increasing by the success of the revolution." The writer continues: "The Unionists lacked the necessary experience and social background to reach the upper echelons of the bureaucracy. There were other reasons that prevented it from going to power. One of them is that the center does not have a nationwide organization. They are not ready to take over the local government.

"The power goes into Babiali's hands. The community continued to play the role of guardian of the Constitutional Monarchy without taking an active role in the management of the empire."

Kazım Karabekir complains for a long time about the organization. He states that development is slow and expresses the damages the delays cause. After explaining to Talât Pasha that centrals were formed in the Third Army region of the monastery, Pasha said: "They cannot organize themselves in important places such as Istanbul, Edirne, Izmir and Anatolia."

"It gave us great strength to take on a very dangerous job like Istanbul and, if possible, Edirne. Then he complains that he went to Istanbul and that he could not form an organisation. Pointing out that the community to be established in Istanbul can be heard quickly, Sarayca says: If you get caught, the Saray will pick at your flesh with tweezers."

When Kazım Karabekir says: "So I'll return to the monastery," Talat Pasha says: "How could that be? You are going with Irade-i Seniye to Istanbul, to the Harbiye School to teach. You come to Thessaloniki. Then you say you give up and return back to the monastery. They will immediately take you to Istanbul under guard for detention. "

"There is no such thing. When we get back to the monastery, we take action. Monastery, Resen, Ohrid from the center "We want freedom," he told the Sultan Tukhad to telegraph the tyrant and we begin to destroy the supporters. If Istanbul persists, we set out as the Army of Liberty under the command of Cihan Seraskeri." Talât Pasha: "We are not ready for such jobs even in Thessaloniki."

The fact is that the Party of Union and Progress was not ready to govern, neither as an organization, nor as an opinion, nor as staff. As a matter of fact, in Talat Pasha's Gurbet Memories, "new people can represent new times. No cycle can rise on the shoulders of the people that's already been tested." And in many places: "Misery and heedlessness is ours. Can we come to power without intellectuals, principles program, content staff and institutions?"

Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın said: "In 1908 there was one organization that loved its homeland and was ready to sacrifice their own lives in order to save it. But there was no organization carrying the knowledge and experiment to manage a country."

The Grand Vizier Sait Halim Pasha also mentions the Committee of Union and Progress in his book "Our Depression." In particular, referring to the painful, bitter ones about who were the real responsables: July Revolution 93 was made in the name of the Constitution. What the revolutionaries demanded and received from the Sultan was nothing but a complete and immediate application of this law. The Law Esasi was revived in this way as a strange repetition of the cases. As he took his revenge on his strong henchmen, he has made himself known to those who want to establish a moment of salvation and progress for his country.

"As the irony of fate, the deputies of the nation adopted what was thought and put forward by the supporters of the will. However, our new mujaddids could not find the legal basis sufficiently liberal.

They tried to change it with the joy of achieving a success they didn't expected and having more power than they wanted. For a job like this, their information was very poor. They wanted to overcome this deficiency by relying on a more or less team of liberty ministers, which they gathered from the books they had seen or read during the journey to their country of origin. Thus, with their inexperienced and proud hands, they attempted to change the Law Act 93."

Sheyhulislam Cemalettin, who touched on the same subject, said in his political memoirs: The prominent figures of the society, on the other hand, started to use violence by believing that they had the authority to organize all works with the feeling and thought of seeing the supremacy in themselves. Finally, the apparent form of the Law was preserved, but the work of the government and the winner started to be carried out. When the inexperience was first introduced, many errors occurred in administration and politics."

Journalist and writer Ecvet Guresin said: "In fact, the oppression of absolutism in a state based on theocratic and monarchic foundations was the entry into the Constitution. The limits of the constitutionalism were indeed not broad. Such a political conception of unlimited political freedom emerged within these narrow boundaries that caused even conflicts between the institutions. The hesitant attitude of The Union and Progress Society which played a leading role in the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy, is both thought-provoking and interesting in terms of showing the understanding at that time."

On July 24, 1908, the new era began in the Ottoman Empire with the re-enactment of the constitution. The Turks, who gained from the opportunities provided by the multi-party Constitutional Monarchy, formed many associations and political organizations based on the Ottoman unity, justice, togetherness, equality, basic rights and freedoms of the person. Non-Turks took also advantage of these opportunities and established many literary, artistic and benevolent associations and political organizations with the intention to break the unity of the state due to racism, nationalism, encouraging feelings of hatred and vengeance against the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish nation.

While analyzing this period, I believe that one has to emphasize the case of March 31 against the Union and Progress as it is one of the most important events of this time.

4.2 – The incident of 31th March

The hunter battalions, which were brought from Salonica to Istanbul, started a riot on April 13th 1909, to protect the constitutional monarchy. Because of the fact that this date is equal to the 31th March 1325 on the Rumi-calendar, it is called the incident of 31th March.

The organization and the encouragers of this incident is still not clarified yet. Barely, it is clear that Sultan Abdulhamit II. was not interested in this at all. With this, there are these generally reasons graded by historians for the Incident of 31th March:

1. From the announcement of the constitutional monarchy until that day, a dis-trusting and assorted situation arose through the pressure of the Union and Progress.

2. Communities like the Rum, Armenian and so on won independence but to es-tablish their nation-state they saw Sultan Abdulhamit II. as an obstacle, from who they must be saved.

3. The announcement of independence in Bulgaria by Ferdinand on October 5th. The annex of the provinces of Bosna Herzegovina by the Austrian-Hungary Empire one day later. The information, that Crete allied with Greece. The Occupation of Ada Kaleb by Austrian soldiers. The inability of the government and the Union and Progress, by whom the government was influenced, towards these occurrences.

4. The secondary officers obstructed the worship of the soldiers by putting practice and education forward.

5. The incapability of the government to catch the murderers of the political as-sassinations done by the Union and Progress in Istanbul

6. The continuation of the political crisis with the resignation of the governments. The interference of the Union and Progress in the government.

7. When the censorship of the print industry was lifted, everybody began to write what they wanted to. The consequence was that accusations against each other increased. At the time of Sultan Abdulhamit Han there were not any newspapers of the “Volkan gazete” which was published by “Dervis Vahdet”, who incited the folk. The minority newspapers un-cloaked the national intentions.

8. The arbitrarily done liquidation in the army and state administration through the pressure of the Union and Progress.

9. Three days before the incident of March 31th, the Union officers told their sol-diers that they aren't allowed to meet with the Imams as the military service is not the place of religious matters.

10. The notable members of the Union and Progress were accused of being ma-sons and this accusation became widespread among the folk. The organization of the in-cident of 31th March, which is still unclear, has the following prehistoric events, which are the reasons for the cause and the results of it:

The leaders of Union and Progress didn't attend the Said Pasha government which established after the constitution. The army officers that are party members, abstained

from participating in the government because they were young and inexperienced. Huseyin Cahid (Yalcin) wrote in Tanin newspaper that there is no need to take responsibility. Not having been affiliated to the cabinet, the government was given to the Said Pasha administration. In the next following years, it was seen that the unionists were tried to be made minister assistants to overcome their shortcomings. So, in this way, they did not take the government but did interfere however they liked it. The Thessaloniki based central part was transferred to Istanbul. Talat, Enver, Midhat, Shukru, Hayri, Habib, Dr. Nazim, Bahaeddin Sakir and Ismail Hakkı were sent to Istanbul to control the government.

There existed a power gap, because the unionists, which caused the proclamation, did not take the government but had interventions on everything while keeping the sultan away from governmental issues raised an authority problem. This problem in almost all the institutions triggered the riots.

As a result of the issue of a minister appointment the Said Pasha government resigned in the 4th of August. Kamil Pasha, whom Sultan Abdulhamit II. talked about as "He wants to be a dictator", became the grand vizier. Kamil Pasha appointed Nazim Pasha as the war minister. The Ahrar Party, which was established in 24 September as opponent of the Union and Progress Committee, became the second party in Turkish political history. Most of the prominent figures of the party were not of Turkish origin, the founders were Celaledin Arif, Nihat Reshad (Belger), Ismail Kemal, Ahmed Samim and Prince Sabahaddin. The party gathered groups against the constitutional monarchy and later Christian members of Parliament in the second proclamation.

Elections of parliament after the second proclamation caused accusations. Austria, who protested the election campaign in Bosnia and Herzegovina, occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina on 5 October. On the same day, Bulgaria declared independence and Cretan joined Greece. The turmoil in the country that came up with the elections and the disasters such as those that had been encountered outside the country had extinguished the hopes related to the constitutional monarchy. When the credibility of the Committee of Union and Progress began to weaken, unidentified assassinations arose to crush the growing opposition. On October 19, the Third Army's fighter battalions in Thessaloniki were brought to Istanbul to ensure the preservation of the constitution and the security of the city.

After the proclamation, with the pressure of the Unionists, the purges between the military officers and the officers in the army increased the number of discontentment and aggravated the unrest. Since the censorship was abolished in the press, hard, provocative writings on the distinction of officers in newspapers such as Serbest, Mizan, Tanin and Volkan, caused among the officers a split-up.

4.3 – Treaties between the Balkan States

Bulgaria was the pioneer in the relationships developed as a result of the provocation by Russia. The Bulgarians, who sought for the opportunity of establishing the old

large Bulgaria by seizing Macedonia and opening to the Mediterranean Sea since the Berlin conference, understood that they would not be able to own Macedonia by themselves and the large states, as their neighbors would not allow this. Serbia desired to have a voice in Macedonia. Greece also was hoping to benefit from the chaos. Montenegro, however, was considering the money payment offer of Bulgaria as war expenditure. In such an environment of different interests, Bulgaria, who accepted the goals of the Russian on the straits, took action in order to sign a treaty with Serbia. After obtaining the support of Russia, it tried to attract the Greek too. After long negotiations, the Bulgarian-Greek relationship was determined on 29 May 1912. Afterwards, the Serbia-Montenegro alliance was signed on 6 October 1912. Before the Ottoman government could find the opportunity to take certain measures against these circumstances, Montenegro declared war against the Ottoman Empire on 8 October.

The Balkan issue, caused by these complicated ambitions of the Balkan states, was concerning the larger states as well. The Balkan policy of Russia focused on three goals. The first goal was to keep the Ottoman in a continuous depression through the Balkan states. The second goal was to clear a way for itself in line with the strait by putting the Slav states in the Balkans under its influence and the third goal was to prevent the expansion of the Austria-Hungary Empire in the Balkans by taking advantage of the same states.

4.4 – The Committee of Union and Progress in the 1908 and 1912 Elections

The government announced on 24 July that the elections would be held as soon as possible and that the parliament, which had been formally formed for thirty years, would convene. This would be the first parliamentary election to be held since 1877. The first constitutional monarchy had prepared the law “*intihab-ı mebusan*”. Since Abdulhamit II suspended the law for thirty-one years, the text accepted by the assembly was not legalized because it was not submitted to the approval of the Sultan. This text was not legalized by the declaration of Second Constitutional Law and was enacted. The elections were held in accordance with this law.⁴

The Committee of Union and Progress won a landslide victory by the elections held in 1908. This situation had increasingly led to the formation of an oppositional group in parliament. The third Ottoman parliament was headed by Ahmet Rıza until January 1912. But the opposition was getting stronger. The Committee of Union and Progress came to elections in order to strengthen its position and to suppress the opposition. Thus, the fraction “*Hurriyet and Itilaf*” took its place in the opposition. The elections of 1912 were made under the heavy pressure of the Union and Progress, and they had established a strong control mechanism through the civil and military administrators. The opposition called these elections, which were won by the Union and Progress, “*sopalı* (with the stick)” or “*dayaklı* (beating)” elections. Halil Bey was elected as the chairman of the Grand National Assembly on 4 May 1912. During this period, when the political crisis reached its peak, began the successive resignations from Union and Progress. The fourth

⁴ Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Hürriyetin İlanı* (İstanbul: Arbe Yayınları, 1959), 161.

assembly was short-lived and was annulled on August the 5th, 1912, after four months. Although the preparations for the new elections began, the Balkan War caused the elections to be postponed to 1914.⁵

5 – The Balkan Policy of Union and Progress

As a result of the nationalist movement spread by the French Revolution in 1789, the nations within the Empire sought for independence and rebelled with the support and assistance of some states. In Ottoman history, the 19th-century is the period of this kind of uprisings. Because there were many different nations in the Balkan Peninsula, nationalist uprisings were seen here the most.

The riots in the Balkans began to develop in the 17th-century and was provoked by Russia, whose biggest aim was to launch to the Baltic Sea and especially to the Mediterranean. To get to the Mediterranean, it had to take over the Black Sea, then Istanbul and the Dardanelles. Russia tried every path to achieve this goal. One of these ways was to use the Balkan principalities, which it was related to by race and religion as tools and incite these young states to end the existence of the Ottoman Empire. While the Ottomans were fighting in Tripoli, the Russian ambassador took action in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, and attempted to share the last remaining pieces of land left by the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans between Serbia and Bulgaria. Serbia, on the other hand, was ignoring Bulgaria in order to deal with the Ottoman Empire to achieve its own interests. The Union and Progress government, which was unwary about the conflicts of interest between the Balkan states, did not even care about these very favourable attempts by Serbia. Moreover, the church conflict that Abdulhamit II. had incited to prevent the unification of the Balkan countries was resolved by the law "ittihad-i anasir" of the Union and Progress. Since this law resolved the conflict between Bulgaria and Greece, it was now the Ottoman Empire, which was the common enemy for both. As a result, Montenegro and Greece joined the alliance between Serbia and Bulgaria. Thus, preparations for action against the Ottoman Empire were completed in the Balkans.

Meanwhile, Turkish army officers were divided into two parties. On the other hand, the government believed the Russians false assurance that they would not allow a war in the Balkans. Asim Bey, Minister of foreign affairs of the embassy of Sofia, said on July 15, in the Chamber of Deputies, the historical sentence: "I am as confident of the Balkans as I am of my faith!" he claimed that there was no possibility of war. In addition, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabriel Noradingiyan, who replaced Asim Bey, reported to the government that Russia's guarantee was certain. As a result of these convincing guarantees, the top 120 battalions in Rumelia were discharged.

After the alliance, the Balkan states declared their wishes to the Ottoman Empire. Without being aware of this alliance, the Unionists had provoked the student of higher education and caused them to shout "war" in front of Babiali (high porte) and staged a

⁵ Zafer Toprak, "Meşrutiyet'te Seçimler ve Seçim Mevzuatı", *Encyclopaedia of Turkey* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1986), IV:974-975.

demonstration against the government. They thought that the war would be easy. However, the allies had determined their war against Turkey and their division projects very detailed.⁶

As long as Abdulhamit II. had been remaining on the throne, he tried to prevent these alliances between the Balkan states particularly those against the Ottoman State. But after the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy (July 24, 1908), the gang movements temporarily halted because of the cooperation of the Union and Progress with the Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek committees. After that, the European states declared that the control over the Macedonian reform was abolished (October 3, 1908). Two days later, Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, which it had occupied since the Berlin treaty. Then the autonomous Bulgarian Principality, which was a part of the Ottoman Empire, declared his independence (October 5, 1908). The next day, Crete announced that it joined Greece.

The Ottoman government's actions against the Greeks to win Serbia and Bulgaria did not prevent the alliance of this internal state. The Union and Progress Administration resolved the issue of the churches, which was the most important disagreement between the Balkan states, with a law enacted on July 3, 1911. The owners of churches and schools in conflict would be determined with this law by the proportion of the population. Thus, the most important issue between the Balkan nations was resolved and the agreements between these nations were facilitated.⁷

Albanians were seen as the castle of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. Especially Abdulhamit II. applied special treatment to Albanians and tried to make them loyal to the Ottoman rule by distributing pashalic and not demanding taxes. During these practices, Albanians were satisfied with the Ottoman rule. However, the practices of Union and Progress under the principle of equality were never welcomed by Albanians and they rebelled four times between 1909-1912. These conflicts in Albania could not be prevented and thus continued until the Balkan War.⁸

After the Ottoman State was diagnosed as a “sick man“, the European states saw that the Ottoman presence in the Balkans was temporal. This idea was strengthened by the fact that Balkan nationalists were drawn to the ideas of nationalism and established or set up independent states. The Committee of Union and Progress was aware of it and established modern and effective governance to reinforce Ottoman sovereignty. It had also Turkified the Albanians in particular.⁹

The Greek policy of the Union and Progress was not successful. The treaty, which ended the church conflicts in Rumelia, introduced a law that compelled all men without any distinction to compulsory military service. This situation had demoralized the army.

⁶Ahmet Kabaklı, “*Temellerin Duruşması*”, Consulted Online: 25 January 2019, <http://www.dalog.com/kavramlar/otuzbirmart.htm>

⁷Cevdet Küçük, “Balkan Savaşı”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1992), V:23-24.

⁸Gülnehal Kır Sayılğan, *Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridelerine Göre Balkanlar “1911-1913”* (master thesis, Gazi University, 2006), 254.

⁹Sina Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki*, (İstanbul: İmge Yayınları, 1987), 205.

For instance, the question of the Turkish-Muslim soldiers, for whom and what they will fight for from now on, had upset the military's morale.

For this and many other reasons, the Ottoman Empire was getting weaker day by day. Those who benefitted most from this poor condition of the state were the groups in the Balkans. The best example of this are the Balkans, as mentioned before, which were backed by great states of Europe, and made various attempts against the Ottoman Empire. For example, to establish an alliance against the Ottoman Empire among themselves or to establish organizations under the name of the association serving their views in various regions are evidences for this. Again, one of the best examples of this are the Balkan Wars.

The Balkan War began because of several mistakes made in both domestic and foreign policies after the constitutional monarchy. Bulgaria was prepared for this war during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamit II. The Yildiz Palace—because it was aware of Bulgarian preparations—warned Bab-i ali (high porte). Sultan Abdulhamit took into account that if the war broke out, the Serb and Montenegrins would also fight with the Bulgarians and wished for the war to take place before the alliance was formed.

While the situation was in this center just before the constitutional monarchy, Abdulhamit II prevented the unification of the Balkans against the Ottoman State with the "envy" policy he had implemented for years. By giving some rights to one of the groups when needed, especially by denominational rights, he aroused jealousy among the others and thus created serious disagreements among the Balkans. The constitutional cabinets, which were unable to benefit from the competition between Balkan nations, were not able to distance themselves from the harmful effects of the narrow idea of patriotism and national politics. They also could not prevent the Rumelia tragedy.¹⁰

The Ottoman Empire then entered the Balkan wars. These wars were a disaster for the Ottoman Empire. There are many possible reasons for the defeats in wars. The defeats were based on the inexperience of the leaders of the Union and Progress, who were represented in the Ottoman government after the Young Turks revolution; the secular politics they adopted; the weakening of religious base; the entering of Christians into the military; the hostile attitude of the great states who wanted to expel Turks from Europe; the collapse of the Ottoman army; the broken rail transport; the lack of good roads; deficiencies in supply and the acceptance of the second-class German military system.

While examining those responsible for these defeats, the following is remarkable: one of those responsible is Union and Progress. It is seen that the betrayal or unwilling struggle of Albanians played an important role in the defeat in the Balkan wars. Considering the treatment of Albanians from the leaders of Union and Progress, it is understood that Albanians are not wrong from their own point of view. The Union and Progress

¹⁰ Ahmet Bedevi Kuran, *İnkılap Tarihimiz ve Jön Türkler* (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2000), 374-375.

should have recognized the importance of Albanian support for the Ottoman Empire to remain in Rumelia and should have been able to manage them by acting wisely. On the other hand, the fact that the Union and Progress, who is also responsible for the disaster in Albania, withdrew from the government despite the overwhelming majority in the parliament is an example of irresponsibility. Although the Union and Progress was responsible for the Albanian's dissatisfaction, the opposition, who provoked the third Albanian uprising and formed the Halaskar Zabitan movement, had the responsibility in this betrayal. The opposition had done all these during the Italo-Turkish war, when the Ottoman Empire was in a weak condition.¹¹

It would be right to criticize the Union and Progress government as the responsible of this defeat. Novice officials of Union and Progress who took over the government showed dissatisfaction with the government rather than serving it with a collective idea. Their emotional movements caused the declaration of the Balkan war because they were not conducive to the administration. The Turkish army was defeated because even the army commanders were not understood all over the country and as result Bulgarians reached the Catalca front. In addition, the policy of Mahmut Shevket Pasha from the cabinet of Union and Progress, who organized and accepted the new military organization and the complex foreign policy, led to the formation of the Balkan unity in the time of Hakki Pasha. The letters written by Ottoman ambassadors - especially our Vienna ambassador - to draw the government's attention on this issue were not taken into account.

As a matter of fact, notifications made by the Rome ambassador Kazım Bey before the Italo-Turkish war about the Italian military preparation were not taken seriously. A few days before the ultimatum given by the Italians, Grand Vizier Hakki Pasha said in the parliamentary that our relationship with the Italian government was very friendly. Furthermore, the defense of all fronts, acting in accordance with a previously prepared plan, was a deficiency of the Union and Progress.¹²

These defeats caused many new problems. Perhaps the most important of these are the atrocities committed by the Balkan states against the muslim-turkish people living there. There had been massacres in many places and the people were trying to escape from this persecution. Thus, the people were forced to migrate. On the other hand, there is the resettlement policy implemented by the Committee of Union and Progress. Now let us focus on this resettlement policy.

The Union and Progress government wanted to reinforce the Turkish population in Anatolia and Thrace. They performed the method of "celib". In other words, the Turks and Muslims who lived outside the borders were brought to the Ottoman territory. On August 31, 1913, Gumulcine, Koshukavak and Ahicelel were transferred and settled in Edirne in order to save the Pomaks from Christianity.

¹¹ Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki*, 216.

¹² Kuran, *İnkılap Tarihimiz ve Jön Türkler*, 383-384.

6 – Conclusion

The Committee of Union and Progress did not understand the importance of the Albanian support for the Ottoman Empire in order to stay in Rumelia and could not manage them. Although the Committee of Union and Progress is the one to blame for the Albanian dissatisfaction, the Halaskaran Zabitan movement, which provoked the last Albanian rebellion for political interests, had an effect on this discontent.

The Ottoman Empire spent all its energy on the territorial integrity of the region due to the disturbances in the Balkans and did not deal with the issues related to the socio-economic situation of the region. One of the most important consequences of the Balkan wars is the independence of Albania. Thus, the Ottoman Empire lost all its lands in Rumelia.¹³

The gang activities in the Balkans, the church struggles and the Albanian revolt had been problematic for many years for the Ottoman Empire, however, the chaos in the administration had made it difficult to solve these problems. In particular, the Committee's "ittihadi anasir" policy did not benefit the Ottoman state and caused a process to start against it.

The Balkans were the first region in which the Ottoman Empire began to lose land. Moreover, it was the connection between the Empire and the West, a region that bears special meaning to be lost. The loss of Rumelia had had a traumatic effect on the survival of the government in the Ottoman state class, the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks movement. The fact that Muslim communities, some of whom had been settled for 400-500 years, had to migrate to Anatolia in masses, in the dissolution of the Ottomans, aggravated this trauma and the event turned into popular mass anxiety. It can be said that the Muslim-Turkish communities who had emigrated from the lost Rumeli served as a carrier in the process of nationalization. In addition, the loss of the Balkans was the end of the vision of Ottomanism in the Committee of Union and Progress. In this context, Turkish nationalism gained strength and became widespread as a reaction to the betrayal against the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. The state formation of non-Muslim elements in the Balkans took place under the auspices of the West. These developments were one of the most important factors for the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress in the liquidation process of the non-muslim elements in Anatolia. The referral and settlement of the Union and Progress would be the main determinant of the ethnic and religious distribution and the mixture of Anatolia today. The migration movements between 1913-1918 were more important than the events of the national struggle and Republican period in terms of population and geography. Considering the living ethnic groups, one-third of the Ottoman population of 17.5 million had been relocated by a general calculation between these dates.¹⁴

¹³ Sayılğan, *Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridelerine Göre Balkanlar "1911-1913"*, 255.

¹⁴ Fuat Dünder, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları İskan Politikası (1913-1918)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 250-251.

The Committee of Union and Progress can be regarded as the struggle for the supremacy of the Turkish element in the empire against the increasing minority activities during the 19th century, the separation from the empire, and the economic and intervention of the European states. After the Committee gained power it tried to rebuild the state through social and political reforms against the economic and political supremacy of England, France, Russia and the minorities.

However, the mistakes made in foreign policy caused these reforms to fail and could not prevent the rapid decline of the borders of the state. After the Italo-Turkish War, Italy captured the Ottoman Tripolitania Vilayet (province) and 12 islands. The mistaken policies followed in the Balkans resulted in an alliance between the Balkan states. At the end of the Balkan wars, all of the sovereignty areas in Europe, except Istanbul's Rumeli hinterland, were left to the Balkan states.

The Balkan war is a turning point in the history of the world as well as in the history of Turkey; it symbolizes a transformation. In the context of the birth of the national identity, the national struggle began in 1912, not 1919. The national identity, which would continue all these wars, came up with the Balkan War. The loss of the Balkans caused the Turkish nationalism as a new national identity. The "elements" of the Ottoman empire, which reconciled until 1912, became "national identities" that conflicted after 1912, the transition from the empire to the nation-state, requiring the common geography, raised a kind of "national homogeneity". The Balkan wars meant the collapse of the Ottoman European identity. From that point on all the attention would be returned to Anatolia and the backbone of Anatolian Turkish nationalism.¹⁵

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¹⁵ Özer Özbozdağı, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Balkan Siyaseti* (master thesis, Mustafa Kemal University, 2005), 159-160

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