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ALEXANDER VEZENKOV

**RECONCILIATION OF THE SPIRITS
AND FUSION OF THE INTERESTS**

"Ottomanism" as an Identity Politics

The history of the different national traditions of social and political thinking in Southeastern Europe is usually examined in their relationship with the developments in the leading European nation states. This is certainly a legitimate approach, but it should be added that beside the multiple interactions between the "marginalized," "small nations" in the "periphery" and the "European core" there was one more major actor – the multinational empires in the Eastern part of the continent. They had their identity politics, which failed in the long run, but had a considerable influence during the 19th century. In what concerns the Ottoman Empire, almost all studies mention these politics, usually referred to as "Ottomanism," but very few of them examine it. This article focuses on "Ottomanism" as a problem in its own right, but also raises the question of the impact of these politics on the national discourses in the region.

According to the conventional view, "Ottomanism" or the idea that all the subjects of the sultan must be bound up in a "brotherly union" became a matter of state policy in the Ottoman Empire during the later years of the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839) and especially during the period of the reforms, known also as the *Tanzimat* (1839–1876). By creating a common feeling of belonging to the Ottoman State, it had to counterbalance arising nationalisms and to preserve the empire from disintegration. It was officially stated that all subjects are and should be called by one and the same name: *Ottomans*.

Although dominating the political agenda of the imperial elite during several decades, ideologically the concept of Ottomanism was formulated only later,

during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Ironically, this was due to a large extent to the critiques of this policy and especially to Yusuf Akçura's famous article "The Three Political Systems" published in 1904 and the consequent answers to his polemical text (Ali Kemal, Ahmet Ferit, etc.).¹ Important intellectual and political figures as Ahmed Midhat and Ebüzziya Tevfik also contributed in these debates. It was only at that time that Ottomanism (in Turkish, *Osmanlılık*) started to be used as a technical term in the sense described above, keeping also its meaning of "Ottomanness."

Despite this intellectual effort, Ottomanism was and remained a vague concept, while "Ottomanist" policy itself gave only a limited result. Foreigners and non-Muslims in the empire persisted in using the words Ottomans and Turks as synonyms; ordinary peasants in Anatolia regarded as Ottomans only members of the elite. It is questionable whether the large majority of the so-called *turcophiles* (i.e., those inclined to see the political future of their community within the Ottoman State) among the Christians in the empire were convinced and conscious adepts of Ottomanism as a long-term perspective. The cases of non-Muslims who accepted calling themselves Ottomans in the sense of belonging to an Ottoman nation, remain anecdotic exceptions. Who was Ottoman was problematic even for those who sincerely used this etiquette for themselves. As Ahmed Midhat Efendi once stated: "I am Ottoman. And not only an Ottoman – I am the purest of Ottomans, I am a Muslim and a Turk."² The perception that "all without exception are Ottomans," but only some of them could be proud of being "purest Ottomans" has never been intellectually surmounted and the use of the term remains ambiguous in the works of many contemporary scholars.

Although using one and the same term, different types of identity were labeled as "Ottomanism." In his famous dictionary of the Turkish language, Şemseddin Sami defined *Osmanlılık* as "belonging to the Ottoman tribe and family (it could be translated also as "people and race") or as "being a subject of the Ottoman State" (*Osmanlı kavim ve cinsine mensubiyet veya Devlet-i Osmaniye'ye tab'iyet...*). To these two meanings corresponded two different priorities in the discussions about Ottoman identity, interested in *all* Ottoman subjects or in those who could pretend to be *purest* Ottomans. The official *Tanzimat* policy, that became latter known as Ottomanism, was directed toward all subjects. It was promoted also as an alternative to the nationalisms of the non-Muslims and aimed at attracting them to identify with and to support the Ottoman State. To a large extent, the Young Turks took up these ideas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and during the 1908 revolution.

1 Akçura (1976).

2 Answering a foreigner during his trip in Europe in 1889: Ahmed Midhat, *Avrupa'da bir cevelân*. Istanbul, 1307=1890, p. 97, quoted after: Strauss (2002), p. 39.

At the same time, most of the Ottoman intellectuals who discussed the problem of Ottomanism were much more preoccupied with the identity issues of the Muslim and Turkish core of the Ottoman subjects. In the early 20th-century debates among Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals, Ottomanism was seen either as an alternative to Turkish nationalism (Akçura) or as something inseparable from Turkish and Islamic identity (Akçura's critics). Akçura's thesis was that there were three possible ways for the political survival of the Ottoman Empire. The first was "Ottomanism," the policy that dominated during the *Tanzimat* period and aimed at the achievement of national unity of all the peoples inhabiting the Ottoman Empire; the second one was Islamism, that became dominant under Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876–1909) and was oriented toward creating closer ties among and winning the support of all Muslims, irrespective of whether they were Ottoman subjects; the third and the newest one was Turkism (which in fact corresponds rather to Pan-Turkism than to present day Turkish nationalism). Akçura examined the advantages and the disadvantages of each one of the three and defended Turkism as a viable alternative of Islamism that dominated at that time. The main critique against Akçura's thesis was that the very question was formulated in a wrong way: it is not possible, wrote Ali Kemal, to separate the Turkic from the Islamic, the Islamic from the Turkic, the Islamic and the Turkic from the Ottoman and vice versa, "to divide the whole into three."³ What was common in both these approaches was that they were concerned mostly with those, who were considered to be at the same time Muslims, Turks and Ottoman subjects, but were irrelevant for the non-Muslim and non-Turkic peoples in the empire. Finally one could see the advocates of the idea of Ottoman identity in the early 20th century gradually adopting the way of thinking and the vocabulary of modern nationalism,⁴ to the extent that some supporters of "Ottomanism" like Ziya Gökalp became exemplary Turkish nationalists.

Due to the existence of different and changing perceptions of Ottomanism and Ottoman identity, studying all the texts dealing with this topic as one single group would lead to misinterpretations. It is important to differentiate between the discussions among the intellectual leaders of the Muslim-Turkish elite in the early 20th century and the propaganda of the *Tanzimat* period that aimed to attract not only the "purest" of the Ottomans but all the subjects of the Empire. From this point of view, the present study focuses on *Tanzimat* Ottomanism (i.e., Ottomanism as an identity politics during the *Tanzimat* period), while keeping an eye on the late 19th and early 20th century debates and interpretations. In parallel, using the Bulgarian case (as one among several possible case studies), it will try to examine how these statements were

3 Ali Kemal in "Our Answer" (Cevabımız) to Akçura: "*bizim için Türkü tslamdan, İslamı Türkten, Türk ve İslamı Osmanlılıktan, Osmanlılığı Türkten, tslamdan ayırmak, tekliği üçe bölmek olamaz.*" in: Akçura (1976), p. 37.

4 Türesay (2005).

translated into the language of one of the non-Turkish peoples living in the Empire and how the "Ottomanist" messages functioned in this particular milieu.

Taking as its starting point Akçura's widely accepted definition of "Ottomanism" as a policy of unifying all the subjects of the Ottoman Empire during the *Tanzimat*, this study uses it only as a working hypothesis. Undoubtedly, at that time, modern political propaganda appeared in the Ottoman State, and it aimed to "awake" the patriotism of all the subjects of the empire. Still, Akçura's definition of "Ottomanism" was very far from the way of thinking of the *Tanzimat* leaders. A representative of a next generation, born in Russia and educated in France, later considered as one of the founding fathers of Turkish nationalism,⁵ he attributed to them his own way of perceiving identity in terms of nations.

THE PRESS AND THE PROPAGANDA OF OTTOMANISM

During the *Tanzimat* period, the Ottoman government engaged with efforts to form and control public opinion through the press. At both the central and the local level, the first newspapers in Turkish were edited by the state. Furthermore, state administration exercised control over private newspapers through a combination of restrictions and subsidies. Newspapers had to educate people, to "denounce" and withstand foreign propaganda and finally to form public opinion, obviously in the direction desired by the state leaders. The people had to be properly "educated" and foreign intrigues intended to disturb people's minds were to be prevented. A Decree of 1867, reducing the freedom of the periodical press, justified this measure with the accusation that "instead of defending the country where they lived and prospered," some newspapers put themselves at the disposal of the enemies of the country. In such a way they had become "an obstacle to the reconciliation of the spirits and to the fusion of the interests."⁶

The newspapers of the non-Muslims published within the Empire also contributed, deliberately or not, to the propagation of "Ottomanist" ideas. The very fact that they were printed within the Empire under state control was not without consequences. Their outspoken fidelity towards the state and the sultan was probably fake, but it contributed to the Ottomanist indoctrination of the non-Muslims. Official propaganda, including what was later called Ottomanism, circulated in private newspapers, including those that were not considered *turcophile*. The very way newspapers were produced was of deci-

5 Georgeon (1980).

6 Aristarchi (1974), vol. III, p. 326.

sive importance: a large part of them consisted of short articles reproduced and usually translated from other newspapers.

The periodical press did not remain only a tool of propaganda, but soon occupied a key place in the political and intellectual life of the empire. During the later decades of the *Tanzimat* period, newspapers (not books!) started to play a crucial role in formulating and popularizing political ideas in the Ottoman Empire.⁷ Unlike the educational system and book printing that were highly autonomous for each community, in the field of the press there was a constant exchange of ideas. This circulation of short articles contributed to the formation of a "spirit of the time" in many respects common for the educated strata, and more generally for the more curious and better-informed individuals among the different peoples in the empire. The sultan's subjects were reading different newspapers in different languages, but in many cases they were reading very similar things. In this regard the intellectual climate created at the end of the *Tanzimat* period essentially differed from the one that existed before. The peoples of the Ottoman Empire were probably not living "like brothers," as the official propaganda claimed, but at that time they were really living "together."

In promoting unity and patriotism, Ottoman authorities relied not only on publishing newspapers, but also on the impact of institutions like the army and the schools. Still, for this study it is the periodical press that is considered to be the most important – both as a propaganda tool that exercised certain influence, and as a source giving the possibility to examine the identity politics of the Ottoman State during the *Tanzimat* period. What is important for the present study are not the original ideas of specific authors, but the frequently repeated arguments, explanations and clichés, that appeared in any newspaper. They could help us to understand the political discourse dominating during the *Tanzimat* era.⁸

THE MAIN ARGUMENTS OF THE "OTTOMANIST" PROPAGANDA

Because it was competing with nationalisms, official Ottoman propaganda had to counter their demands and claims. There was, however, one problem: Ottomanism was not able to propose an ethnocentric vision about who the Ottomans were, including all the subjects of the sultan. The same was true

7 Koloğlu (1992), 130 sqq.

8 Beside the existing studies on the 19th-century Ottoman press, the present article relies mostly on *Tuna/Dunav*, the official local newspaper published in Turkish and Bulgarian in Rusçuk (Rousse), the capital city of the Danube Province, in the years 1865–1877. Obviously it is a provincial newspaper, but such newspapers were prepared by civil servants of the respective local administration and for that very reason they are much more representative of the mentality of the Ottoman officials, than the "semi-official" newspapers published in French in the capital.

about faith and language. For that very reason, the official propaganda usually avoided discussing certain questions, and the accent was put on a different type of arguments that had to counterbalance the nationalist claims.

EQUALITY

The official propaganda insisted on the equality of all its subjects and especially between Muslims and non-Muslims. They had to be equal in rights (before the law, in courts, etc.) and in duties (in paying taxes). According to the Reform Edict of 1856, subjects had to have equal access to positions in the public administration and even to the army.⁹ The new legislation usually pointed out that access to different positions and institutions was open to "all classes of the Ottoman subjects." This was the case for enrollment in state schools,¹⁰ as civil servants and even as prison guardians.¹¹ The propaganda concerning "equal rights" was very intensive and provoked nervous reactions from both sides. Non-Muslims started complaining that their newly acquired equality was not respected in practice and were reporting cases of discrimination. From the other side, the claim that due to the reforms and the interventions of foreign powers non-Muslims received more liberties was widespread and voiced by statesmen and intellectuals alike.¹² These claims reappear in present day Balkan and respectively Turkish historiographies.

The most problematic dimension of equality was related to military service. Despite the intention of the 1856 Reform Edict, non-Muslims with some insignificant exceptions were not enrolled in the army before 1909. But at least in theory all male subjects were contributing equally to the security of the Sublime State, although in a different way – some by serving under the banners, others by paying the military tax.¹³ Another possibility for non-Muslims to participate in the protection of the state were donations (usually in cash) for the Ottoman army, regularly reported in the official press.¹⁴

TOLERANCE

The official propaganda underlined the tolerance of the Ottoman State towards the non-Muslims combined with counter-examples of mistreatment of Muslims in Greece, Russia, etc. Articles in the press reported cases of fair treatment of Greeks by the Ottoman authorities, even compassion toward

9 Findley(1982a).

10 *Düstur* (1290= 1873/4), vol. II, p. 187.

11 "Habshaneler gardiyanlar için talimatlar" art. 2: "her sınıf tebaa'dan adam intihab edilecektir" in *Düstur* (1293=1876/7), vol. III, pp. 220–222.

12 Midhat Pacha (1878), pp. 13–14; Yerlikaya (1994), pp. 104–106; Rahme, (1999), pp. 28–29.

13 Namık Kemal reacted by pointing out that it was not the same to pay and to die: Rahme (1999), p. 36.

14 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 277, May 19, 1868.

them, and at the same time reported cases of mistreatment of Muslims/Turks by the Greeks.¹⁵ The discrimination of the Jews in Eastern European countries (mostly in Romania and Russia) was a preferred topic for the newspapers, offering another occasion to underline the tolerance in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶

LIVING LIKE BROTHERS

In writings about the equality and the tolerance towards non-Muslims, one could often find the statement that all the subjects of the sultan were living "like brothers" [*kardeşçe*]. The implicit message was that religious and other differences were not an obstacle for living together. Symptomatic of this brotherhood were the donations, regularly reported in the press, testifying for the compassion of Christians for Muslim refugees (from Crimea, Crete, Serbia).¹⁷ These "politically correct" and kind words of brotherhood were usually absent from the discourse about gypsies.¹⁸

JUSTICE

One topic that reappeared very often in the official publications was justice [*adalet*]. It was presented as characteristic for Islam and also for the Ottoman State. It was claimed that the successes of the first sultans were due to the fair treatment they had shown toward everybody;¹⁹ later sultans behaved in the same way.²⁰ Still, justice was presented not only as a traditional value, but also as something restored by the reforms. Numerous articles insisted that the Ottoman legislation was constantly improving and were calling the subjects to respect the law.²¹ The new laws and regulations were usually published in the official press and occasionally in other newspapers. In some cases, the legal text was preceded by an introduction underlining the improvement introduced by the respective law, assuring better and equal treatment of the subjects.²²

15 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 307, September 1, 1868.

16 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 189, July 5, 1867; no. 258, March 6, 1868; no. 327, November 10, 1868; no. 559, March 17, 1871.

17 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 162 and the following numbers, 1867.

18 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 464, April 5, 1870; no. 233, December 6, 1867; no. 260, March 13, 1868.

19 Midhat-Pacha (1878), pp. 7–8.

20 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 323, October 27, 1868.

21 *Typami*, no. 4, March 15, 1869; *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 415, October 1, 1869; *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 494, July 22, 1870.

22 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 192, 1867.

SECURITY

In addition to the image of the Ottoman state as providing equal and fair treatment to all its subjects (and to a large extent to foreigners), the administration was praised as securing peace and order. Reports on crimes appeared regularly in official newspapers, but they were always accompanied by the information that the criminal had already been captured and brought to justice, or at least that the local authorities were following the wrongdoer and it was only a question of time before he was caught. In some cases, the information quoted the article of the Penal Code, under which the criminal had been sentenced, thus demonstrating that law was respected.²³ Cases of Christian peasants who had emigrated but wanted to move back to the empire also received coverage by the press, thus underlying the full protection provided by the sultan and his government.

THE SULTAN

Just like other autocrats of the 19th century, the Ottoman sultans tried "to forge a direct link with their people."²⁴ During the *Tanzimat* period this link was very important and was almost synonymous with the fidelity toward the Ottoman State. It is only at later stages with the Young Turks and especially after the 1908 revolution when patriotism without the sultan became conceivable. Still, during the *Tanzimat*, the official propaganda counted very much on the traditional feelings of fidelity toward the sultan: at that time his portrait began to be exposed in public places,²⁵ editorial articles in newspapers and prefaces of printed books presented him as the guardian and initiator of everything positive in the empire. His voyages throughout the country, donations for mosques, schools and other initiatives also aimed to contribute to his popularity.

Publications in Bulgarian paid tribute to the reigning sultan on a regular basis. The pleonastic phrase "our Tzar His Majesty the Sultan" that appeared in these texts is a clear sign of an attempt to present the sultan as part of the Bulgarian political tradition. This was not only lip service – notes and chronicles written for private use also eulogize the sultan and the members of his family.²⁶

23 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 447, February 1, 1870.

24 Deringil (1998), p. 17.

25 Deringil (1998), p. 22.

26 Published in: Nachev, Fermandzhiev (1984), especially pp. 161, 180, 190, 294 and 351.

PATRIOTISM

Simultaneously the authorities strove to promote a new feeling – patriotism toward the Ottoman State, irrespective of religious or any other affiliation.²⁷ The word "*vatan*" in Turkish and simultaneously its equivalent in Bulgarian ("*otechestvo*") next to their original meaning of "native place," began to acquire the new sense of "fatherland" (closer to the meaning of "*Vaterland*" in German). This process took place only gradually, and in the 1850s and 1860s only a few people used the word in this new way.²⁸ The changing meaning of the word "*vatan*" and the portraying of the whole Empire as a "native place," was related to the idea that the territory of the state was an indivisible whole. The unity and indivisibility of the Ottoman State were proclaimed in the opening article of the 1876 Constitution.

Patriotism had to become the main argument for serving in the army. Although religious fever remained decisive for motivating an almost exclusively Muslim army, patriotic discourse was forged as well. A speech delivered by the military commander of the town of Nish in 1869 and reproduced in *Tuna* provides a good example of civic patriotism, avoiding any references to religion, Allah or Holy War. It was devoted to the obligation of the military men to serve "the monarch, the state, the fatherland and the people" ("*melik ve devlet ve vatan ve millet*"; in the Bulgarian version translated as: "*vladetelya, dârzha-vata, rodinata i národa*") and to protect them.²⁹

The concept of the "fatherland" appeared earlier and was much more successful than the idea of bestowing a common denomination to all subjects.³⁰ Although the non-Muslims never accepted perceiving themselves as "Ottomans," as the 1876 Constitution postulated (art. 8, indirectly in art. 9 and 17), during the *Tanzimat* period they began to refer to the Ottoman state as the "fatherland." Starting at least from the early 1850s, one could find in Bulgarian newspapers expressions like "our common fatherland – the Ottoman tzar-dom"³¹ or "common and dear fatherland."³² Patriotism did not always mean loyalty to the Ottoman state – the leaders of the national movements also called themselves "patriots." An article in *Turtziya* explained, obviously from an official point of view, the difference between "real" and "fake" patriotism.³³

27 Petrosyan (1975), p. 144: article on patriotism in *Sarajevští cvjetnik* of July 25, 1875.

28 Heinzelmann (2002). The word "*vatan/otchestvo*" continued to be used with its old meaning of "native place" even in official editions: *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 550, February 10, 1871.

29 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 387, June 22, 1869.

30 See Dessislava Lilova's text in this volume for a very interesting example of a Bulgarian journalist analyzing the railway network from "'Turkish territorial' (*turskozemna*) point of view."

31 *Tzarigradski vestník*, no. 68, January 1, 1852.

32 *Makedoniya*, IV, no. 1, November 15, 1969.

33 *Turtziya*, V, no. 20, July 5, 1869.

PROSPERITY

The official propaganda insisted that the Ottoman state provided not only security, but also comfort and prosperity [*rahat ve refah*] for its subjects. Stability of the Ottoman state and prosperity of the people were presented as closely interrelated and this was made very clear in the *Hatı̄şerif of Gülhane* (1839). According to the official propaganda, the small (non-Muslim and non-Turkish) peoples included in the Empire could achieve prosperity only within the Ottoman state, and only if the state itself was prospering. According to this view, the small national states were unviable and dependent on other foreign countries and interests.³⁴ Publications in official newspapers insisted that the unity of all peoples was needed to achieve economic and cultural prosperity. In such a way, the developmentalist discourse was combined with the idea of a brotherly union among the different peoples and the call for serving the fatherland.

FOREIGNERS

The self-identification of the subjects with the Ottoman State was to a large extent built by opposing them to foreigners. The Law of Ottoman Citizenship or, if translated literally, of "subjectship" (1869)³⁵ was above all an attempt to prevent the subjects of the sultan from opting for a *foreign* citizenship. The law itself was not concerned with the unity of Muslims and non-Muslims, it was not insisting on equality, as some studies overinterpreted it,³⁶ but aimed at drawing a clear line between the Ottoman and the foreign subjects.

The same opposition to foreigners is visible in publications on economic issues. Protectionism of local production became a state policy in the 1860s. At the same time, the Ottoman press began to call for the use of local products instead of imported ones. In these texts local products were praised regardless of the faith of their producers.³⁷ In general, the developmentalist discourse, much as the feelings against the foreign powers and their interventions, provided a good basis for pleading for the unity of the Ottoman peoples.

Although competing with the various internal nationalisms, foreign "intrigues" were considered the main threat for the Ottoman State. An article in *Turtziya* (1864–1873, ed. Nikola Genovitch) expressed satisfaction that a group of radical Bulgarian emigrants in Romania broke their relations with Russia.³⁸ This is because from the official point of view the nationalist move-

34 Abu-Manneh (1980), p. 298; *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 435, December 14, 1869.

35 *Düstur*, (1289=1872/3), vol. I, 16–18; *Edirne/Adrianopolis/Odrin*, no 64, January 22, 1869.

36 Safrastyan (1985), pp. 60–61; Mazhdrakova-Tchavdarova (1988), p. 82.

37 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 308, September 4, 1868; no. 314, September 25, 1868; no. 326, November 6, 1868.

38 *Turtziya*, no. 2, March 1, 1869.

ments were mere tools in the hands of foreign states. Similar was the attitude toward foreign missionaries, therefore the authorities clearly preferred non-Muslims to keep their traditional faith, than to convert to "foreign creeds."³⁹

One may ask to what extent the writings on all these topics were connected with each other and whether they constituted one coherent political project. A positive answer could be given only with caution. It should be noted, first of all, that the Ottoman propaganda during the *Tanzimat* made use of a number of traditional arguments. The figure of the sultan as a just ruler, preventing all kinds of oppression towards the ordinary people was not a novelty. The same applies to the idea that the non-Muslims inhabiting the Ottoman state enjoyed its protection – Ottoman documents always used different terms for the non-Muslims within and outside the Ottoman Empire. It should be indicated that many arguments were based on Islam: the Ottoman State provided justice because Islam was a religion of justice; the Ottoman State had always been tolerant because Islam was tolerant towards other religions; the Ottomans were able to achieve progress because Islam was opened to innovations, etc. The Hatt-i Şerif of Gülhane started by referring to the Koran. Some thinkers went further and tried to find the roots of everything new and positive in Islam: Namık Kemal for example found justification in the Koran for the principal of representative government and stated that the separation of power existed in the early Islamic history.⁴⁰

As a consequence, at the level of argumentation, the transition to Islamism in the following years was relatively easy. In this respect the thesis that Islamism *replaced* Ottomanism under Abdulhamid II should be at least partially revised: Ottomanism was not replaced by Islamism, it only became more Islamist. In addition, the Islamist policy in the following decades did not discredit Ottomanism among the large majority of the most numerous non-Turkish populations in the Empire – the Arabs, nor among most of the Albanians. Ottoman patriotism was also actively propagandized during the following decades and in the first months after the 1908 revolution even non-Muslim leaders seemed enthusiastic about the "common fatherland."

It should be added, that in its early stages the Turkish national movement after World War I had predominantly Islamic motivations and rhetoric in contrast to the aggressive laicism characteristic of the second half of the 1920s and 1930s.⁴¹ Finally, various "Ottomanist" arguments of minor importance were also appropriated by Turkish nationalism. Let us give only one example in this regard: an article on education reprinted in *Tuna* from *Mümeviz* claimed that honesty was a traditional Ottoman virtue, which was lost un-

39 Deringil (1998, p. 29) quotes to this effect an imperial order of 1897.

40 Rahme (1999), p. 32.

41 Zürcher (1999).

der the impact of civilization.⁴² Lost, but not for too long. In his main work *The Principles of Turkism (Türkçülüğün esasları, 1923)* Ziya Gökalp devoted a whole chapter to "honesty" as something specific to the Turks – a quality that earlier was specific to the "Ottomans."

But even if many of the virtues of the Ottoman state were due to Islam (tolerance, justice), even if some of them were to remain characteristic also for the Turkish nation (honesty), there is no doubt that during the *Tanzimat* a new type of political agenda was brought into life. A good illustration of this agenda is a brochure published in 1847 in Constantinople, which, according to a note on the front page, was compiled of "*extraits de Journal de Constantinople et Echo d'Orient.*" The title and the subtitle were eloquent enough: *De l'unité nationale dans l'Empire Ottoman. Par la législation, l'administration, le territoire, la tolérance, l'éducation et la presse.* The brochure presented the new political concepts introduced with the reforms: universality of law, ter-unity of the state and uniform administration, religious tolerance, secular educational system for all subjects, development of book printing and periodical press. Here was a whole program, starting with its embodiment in the new legislation and finishing with its propagation in newspapers (the brochure itself being one of its products), which envisaged the achievement of "the national unity of the Ottoman empire." What this "national unity" meant is a question that needs a separate and detailed analysis.

"THE OTTOMAN NATION" OR "THE OTTOMAN PEOPLES"

There are different interpretations of whether the leaders of the *Tanzimat* period aimed to create "one single nation" as Akçura stated and as the national historiographies in the post-Ottoman space insist⁴³ or, more modestly, to forge a common feeling of belonging to the Ottoman State despite religious and any other differences.⁴⁴ In this respect one could discover a strange coincidence: scholars who criticize the "Ottomanist" policy claim that it intended to create "one single Ottoman nation," while the majority of those who are, or are suspected of being pro-Turkish and pro-Ottoman usually describe it in vaguer terms. The second approach is preferred here for several reasons. First, because of the vagueness of the official discourse itself, it would be inappropriate to formulate a strong thesis. Second, it seems that the *Tanzimat* leaders were relatively pragmatic and realistic in defining their objectives in what

42 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 398, August 1869.

43 Petrosyan (1975), p. 142; Safrastyan (1985); Mazhdrakova-Tchavdarova (1988), p. 82; Doganalp-Votzi, (2002), p. 61; Todev (2003), pp. 186, 196 and 202.

44 Paul Dumont in Mantran (1989), p. 497; Rahme (1999), p. 24. Some authors opt for labels like "political," "civic" or "non-ethnocentric" nation: Adanır (1992), p. 167; *Encyclopedia of nationalism* (2000), vol. II, p. 388; see also Bülent Bilmez's text in this volume.

concerns identity politics. But what is most important is that contrary to their critics, they were not thinking in national terms.

The crucial problem is that as a technical term "Ottomanism" was introduced and is now usually used by people criticizing the ideology and the policies of the *Tanzimat* leaders and for that very reason it was caricaturized. Akçura's statement that Ottomanism was an ambition to make "one single nation" [*tek bir millet*] from the subjects of the sultan was part of a political manifesto, one may say a manipulation, which has been taken seriously by later scholars. He presented Islamism and Turkism as two feasible policies, opposed to Ottomanism as something completely unrealistic. It seems that in most cases this thesis is reproduced uncritically – due to the deficit of studies and debates on the *Tanzimat* Ottomanism the above-mentioned statement remained largely unquestioned. On the other hand, at least in some cases it is done intentionally, in trying (just as Akçura did) to make the *Tanzimat* policies look unrealistic, as if these policies pursued an unachievable goal. But just like the term "Ottomanism," the expression "one single [Ottoman] nation" is not to be found in the writings of the *Tanzimat* leaders.

By analyzing only the key notions and terms in the "Ottomanist" discourse, as some scholars already attempted, we cannot solve the question of what was the Ottoman identity made. In general, studies dealing with problems of identity in the late Ottoman Empire point out the inconsistent and even contradictory use of key words in the identity discourse (such as *millet*, nation, race, the preference for the term "Ottoman" or "Turkish," etc.) in Ottoman Turkish, even by one and the same person.⁴⁵ In this situation, it is important to examine not so much the use of such terms, but to try to understand the political project of the *Tanzimat* leaders in its integrity. In order to find out what official policy intended, we should try to answer two main questions. First, whether the Ottoman identity was intended to replace the identification with the existing *millets*, whether differences between peoples had to disappear once the Ottoman identity was consolidated. Second, whether this "Ottoman identity" was identical with the modern notion of "nation."

Most studies give a positive answer to the first question but usually *in passim*, without giving any arguments.⁴⁶ On the contrary, I would argue that the answer to this question should be negative. In the first place, those who discussed the problem of the "union of all peoples in the Ottoman Empire" used two different terms to name the different *milleti*, and the bigger union. For example, Ebüzziya Tevfik insisted that there was not and could not be any

45 E.g., Ebüzziya Tevfik: Türesay, (2002), pp. 6–7. Two other contributions to this volume discuss these or similar contradictions: Bülent Bilmez is focusing on the inconsistent use of such terms by Şemseddin Sami, and Stefan Detchev is discussing the ambiguous use of the term "race" in late 19th-century Bulgarian texts.

46 E.g., David Kushner speaks of "'Ottoman nation' which would replace the old, narrow loyalty to the community..." Kushner (1977), p. 3; See also note 43.

"Ottoman millet" because different *milleti*, and *kavimi*, formed one single Ottoman *ümmet* (i.e., *umma* ', the word that otherwise means "the universal Muslim community").⁴⁷ Different terms were used in this case by the Syrian political and intellectual leader Butrus al-Bustani, who wrote about the Ottoman *umma*', composed of many "racial" groups [*ajnas*] that had "common interests."⁴⁸ The use of the two different terms shows clearly that the *milleti*, the *kavim*?, or the *ajnas* on the one hand and the larger Ottoman community on the other (the Ottoman *umma*') were of a different order.

Some formulations could be confusing. In a brochure published in 1878 Midhat Paşa, the initiator of various reforms at the local level and of the 1876 constitution, wrote about "the fusion of the different races," but the central issue in this "fusion" was the establishment of a constitutional regime.⁴⁹ For Midhat Paşa, "*la fusion entre les diverses races*" meant the achievement of political unity, the creation of a "common fatherland," not melting in a single nation – a term he did not use. On the contrary, Midhat Paşa kept seeing Muslims and non-Muslims (and probably to a large extent "*les diverses races*"), as distinct units, participating in a larger union. Whenever Midhat initiated mixed structures, Muslims and non-Muslims had separate representation with quotas: in the local councils as well as in the mixed courts. According to his constitutional project, they had to have also quotas, for the representation in the Chamber. A very similar message is to be found in the article by Namık Kemal, "*İmtizac-ı akvam*" – the title could be translated as "fusion" but also as "the harmonizing of the populations/tribes/nations." The advocated "fusion of the various populations of the Empire" is to be understood as some kind of political unity, inasmuch it had to be achieved through the introduction of a constitution and a new educational system.⁵⁰ The author of a short article in *Courrier d'Orient*, reproduced in *Makedoniya* (1866–1872, ed. Petko Slaveikov), was aware of the possible confusion. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, the article underlined that "the fusion" meant only "the fusion of the interests of the different peoples," and that the fusion of the peoples themselves could happen only by a divine miracle.⁵¹

The *Tanzimat* leaders envisaged no practical steps for fusion of the diverse ethnoses into one nation. First of all, they regarded the unity of all Ottoman subjects as easily achievable through some political decisions – reform edicts of the sultan or the constitution of 1876. Some of them proposed that Muslims and non-Muslim should study together in mixed schools and should serve together in the army. Special attention deserves the much-discussed issue with

47 In his dictionary published in 1891: Strauss (1999), p. 24.

48 Abu-Manneh (1980), p. 298.

49 Midhat Pacha (1878), pp. 14 and 29. It seems that the expression "*la fusion des races*" comes from the Turkish "*ittihad-i anasır*" – "the union of the elements."

50 *İbret*, no. 14, June 20, 1872: Rahme (1999), p. 34.

51 *Makedoniya*, III, no. 11, February 8, 1869; the same in an article reproduced in *Makedoniya*, I, no. 9, January 28, 1867 from *Gazette du Levant*.

the project for mixed schools, launched by *Tanzimat* leaders in the late 1860s. Because it was never implemented, some historians feel free to interpret it as a tool for "complete assimilation of the non-Muslims into the ruling nation." Still, a few mixed schools were created and they could give us an idea what the authorities had intended. These are the so-called *islahhanes* – reformatory schools for orphans or delinquent children. In those in the Danube Province there were Bulgarian and Turkish teachers and separate religious lessons for Muslims and non-Muslims.⁵² The purpose was to educate the children together in order to make them all "good Ottoman subjects" not to convert them to "Muslims" and "Turks." Otherwise, part of them had to become "good Muslims," the others "good Christians." The Bulgarian notables and journalists (and, following them, the Bulgarian national historiography) rejected the idea of the mixed schools, but were favorable to the *islahhanes*.

The idea of creating one Ottoman nation appeared in the Ottoman press but it was usually launched by foreigners. This was the case with the much-circulated proposal published in *La Turquie*, that the name of the state and of all its subjects should be changed to the Oriental Empire and Orientals respectively.⁵³ The editor-in-chief of the newspaper at that time was Charles Mismar, a French adventurer, turcophile, fascinated by the example of the United States.⁵⁴ He wrote later that as an editor-in-chief he enjoyed considerable liberty and called his own writings "*mes extravagances*."⁵⁵ Nonetheless, such publications are often quoted as proving the intention of the Ottoman government to assimilate all subjects into a single nation.

In other cases the "one single nation" thesis is supported with references to *post-Tanzimat* texts, for example to Ziya Gökalp, who was saying at some point that the Ottoman nation was like the American nation.⁵⁶ It is not surprising that Gökalp, one of the "fathers of the Turkish nationalism," should perceive the "Ottoman millet" as a modern nation. Obviously, his views could not be representative for *Tanzimat* Ottomanism and should not be used to illustrate it.

Negative should also be the answer of the second question – whether the projected Ottoman identity corresponded to the modern notion of "nation" in its "civic" or "ethnic" understanding. Those who adopted the modern idea of the nation were inclined towards Turkish nationalism rather than to a "brotherly union of all peoples living in the Ottoman Empire." The few who were concerned with the Turkish element of the Ottoman State, like Süleyman Paşa and Ahmed Vefik Paşa, would be praised later as precursors of Turkism. Ex-

52 Kornrumpf (1983); Bakârdzhieva (2001).

53 Published also in: *Makedoniya*, II, no. 25, May 18, 1868; later severely criticized in *Narodnost/Naftonalitate*, no. 14, February 23, 1869.

54 Georgeon (1992).

55 Georgeon (1992), p. 103.

56 Safrastyan (1985), p. 118.

pressions such as "the Ottoman millet" or "the Ottoman people" were occasionally used to denominate the subjects of the sultan, but the singular form in this case was used without the implied meaning of an indivisible body, nor was it excluding the existence of different peoples in the empire. The often-used expression "living like brothers" was related to the idea that there were different peoples, not a single one.

An explicit answer to the question is to be found in an article published by the famous novelist and journalist Ahmed Midhat in 1897, where he compared "Ottomanism" to the other nations and highlighted the differences. Ahmed Midhat described "*Osmanlılık*" as a rather complicated structure and finally he presented the identification with the Ottoman Empire at two levels – with the state and the dynasty on behalf of all subjects, and, in addition to it, with Islam and Turkishness on behalf of those who were Muslims and Turks.⁵⁷ Although not so popular as the clear definition given by Akçura, this one reflected much more realistically the perception of being Ottoman at two levels – narrower for the "purest Ottomans" and broader for all subjects. Moreover Ottomanism had its inner hierarchy and priorities: in "the union of the elements" (*ittihad-i anasır*) there was one "fundamental element" (*unsur-i asli*) – "the Turks and the Anatolian peoples."⁵⁸ Equality was acceptable only to the extent it did not hurt the interests of the Muslim/Turkish element: in the Lyceum of Galatasaray "children from all classes of the Ottoman Empire" were accepted, but "at least half of them" had to be Muslim.⁵⁹

If one looks for a larger comparative perspective, Ottomanism of the *Tanzimat* period could be compared with the identity politics in the Habsburg and in the Russian Empire at that time, instead of trying to assimilate it to different types of "civic" or "political nationalism" in Western Europe or Northern America. In the former cases the imperial administration was aware of the existence of different groups with their own identity, elite, traditions and national aspirations and the aim was to achieve certain cohesion of all subjects without trying to melt the different groups into "one nation." In all these empires one could see the dominant position of one community (and even two in the Habsburg Empire, especially after 1867) but at the same time the central power was ready to make concessions to other religious, linguistic or national communities in order to appease and to attract them. Therefore a term like "imperial supranationalism" would be more helpful for describing the Ottomanist policy during the *Tanzimat* period.⁶⁰

57 Kushner (1977), p. 40. The article is "Osmanlılığımızın başka Milliyetlere Adem-i Müşahabeti" in *Tercüman-i Hakikat*; no 5881, September 13, 1897.

58 Deringil (1998), p. 59 quoting a report by Osman Nuri Pasa of 1885.

59 "Reglement Organique de Lycée Impérial," art. 5 in: Aristarchi (1874), vol III, p. 317.

60 Findley (1982b).

"REGARDLESS OF RELIGION AND SECT.."

If the political and intellectual leaders of the *Tanzimat* were not preoccupied with the nation and ethnicity, they insisted on religion. In legal and political texts the differences between the subjects were classified in one category, although expressed with two words "religion and sect" [*din ve mezheb*]. This is crucial for understanding how the Muslim-Turkish statesmen, state officials, intellectuals and journalists of the *Tanzimat* period perceived individual and collective identity. In contemporary texts in other languages and in later studies the reference to "religion and sect" [*din ve mezheb*] is often translated as "religion and nation." In a high style Ottoman Turkish very often two words are used to say one and the same thing. Translators usually make the effort to find synonyms, in order to preserve these constructions, but here the translation of "sect" into "nation" makes visible an important difference in the way of thinking. For those who were translating, people differed not only in religion, but also in nationality.

Even without translating in a different language Yusuf Akçura changed the initial meaning of the phrase, when he wrote that Sultan Mahmud II and his followers believed in the possibility to transform the populations varying in race and religion into one single nation.⁶¹ Sultan Mahmud II, as it could be seen from the same paragraph of Akçura's text, had in mind only people of different *faiths*, without referring at all to race [*ırk*] or anything similar to it (tribe, nation, people of different origin, etc.). The expression "one single nation" [*tek bir millet*] is also added by Akçura.

Some contemporary scholars, who claim that the *Tanzimat* leaders aimed at a complete fusion of the different peoples into one Ottoman nation, support their thesis with the argument that in the envisaged Ottoman unity *only one* difference was to remain – religion. One has to take into account, that if religion was the most important identity marker for the *Tanzimat* leaders, this "single difference" was a crucial one. The reforms were not aiming at a "civic nation" where religion would not count any longer. Religious division was something basic for the statesmen and the intellectuals in the 19th-century Ottoman Empire. Ottoman legislation was constantly referring to "Muslims/non-Muslims"; population statistics always presented population figures subdivided into the same two categories "Muslims and non-Muslims" (in some cases giving more detailed picture, counting separately Jews, Armenians, etc.). Official texts only rarely mentioned that subjects differed not only in faith, but also in language and nationality: such examples are to be found at one place in the 1856 Reform Edict and, surprisingly, in the opening speech of Abdulhamid II to the first Ottoman parliament. Difference in nationality was not mentioned in the 1876 Constitution, nor in the answer of the Parliament to the opening speech of the sultan.

61 Akçura (1976), p. 20: "devletin ırk ve dini farklı tebaasını serbestlik ve müsavât ile, emniyet ve karşılıklı dostluk ile meze ve terkiy edip tek bir millet haline sokmanın imkânına inanıyorlardı."

The Ottoman leaders identified the state mostly with its Islamic component. Even a modernizer such as Midhat Paşa perceived and presented religion as a more important identity marker than language, race or origin. In the above quoted brochure of 1878 he described the Muslim-Turkish population in the Bulgarian provinces as "*Musulmans Bulgares*."⁶² In Midhat Paşa's logic, since they were Muslims, the territories they inhabited had to remain within the Ottoman Empire in case of secession of a Bulgarian Principality.

FAITHFUL TO THE STATE, FAITHFUL TO THE COMMUNITY

One of the main characteristics of the *Tanzimat* edition of the idea of Ottoman unity is that it envisaged a double loyalty – to the state and to one of the (religious) communities. Regulations for the non-Muslim millets (the so-called *constitutions*) required from the spiritual leaders of the non-Muslims fidelity both to their respective millet and to the Ottoman State.⁶³ The semi-official *La Turquie* praised a certain Gheorgi Bey, an Istanbul-based Bulgarian (most probably Gheorgaki Çaloğlu/Tcholakov) who did not differentiate between Bulgarian and Turkish patriotism.⁶⁴ Editorials in the Bulgarian newspapers published in Istanbul insisted that they would serve simultaneously the interest of the Bulgarian people (in some cases the Bulgarian Church was also mentioned) and of the state and/or the sultan.⁶⁵ In other cases they advocated the coincidence between the interests of the Bulgarian people and the throne, arguing that the stability and the prosperity of the Ottoman state was in the best interest of the Bulgarian people.⁶⁶

In some cases one could also tactically motivated usages of the "Ottomanist" discourse. For instance, the group of radical Bulgarian emigrants, who organized a military band that entered the empire in July 1868, prepared also a memoir to the sultan where they referred to the "double interests," i.e., the coinciding interests of the Ottoman Empire and the Bulgarian people. In fact, the organizers of this political and military action demonstrated their ability to use both the national discourse (in the appeal to the Bulgarian population) and the "Ottomanist" discourse (in the memoir to the sultan).⁶⁷

62 Midhat Pacha (1878), p. 21: "*ce sont des descendants des Bulgares convertis à l'Islamisme... ce sont les enfants d'un même pays, d'une même race, sortis de la même souche.*"

63 *Düstur* (1290=1873/4), II, p. 969: the members of the spiritual councils to the Orthodox Church had to be "faithful to and loving their state and their millet" (*devlete ve milletine sadık vemuhib*); similar regulations were envisaged for the spiritual leader of the Jewish community, the so-called Hahambashi: "*devletçe ve milletçe şayan-i emniyet ve itimad bulunan*" (*ibid.*, p. 962).

64 Quoted after *Narodnost/Naționalitate*, no. 14, February 23, 1869.

65 *Tzarigradski vestnik*, no. 484, June 25, 1860; *Vek* (1874–1876, ed. Marko Balabanov), Editorial, no. 1, January 12, 1874; *ibid.*, no. 1, January 4, 1875.

66 *Istochno Vreme*, Bulgarian edition of *The Levant Times'*. Editorial N I, January 12, 1874.

67 Published both in: Kasabov (1905), pp. 114–118 (in Bulgarian) and Refik (1341=1922/3), pp. 153–156 (in Ottoman Turkish).

Even more compelling are the examples of combining the "two patriotisms" given by the openly *turcophile* newspapers – notorious with their loyalty to the state, they demonstrated also an outspoken Bulgarian nationalism. The newspaper *Turtziya* (1864–1873, ed. Nikola Genovitch) had the subtitle "newspaper in the interests of the people" [*vestnik za interesiti na narodât*] which became more precise in 1869: "newspaper in the interests of the Bulgarian people" [*vestnik za interesiti na bâlgarskia narod*]. In this way *Turtziya* presented itself with a subtitle very similar to the subtitle of the previously published newspaper *Bâlgaryia* (1859–1863, ed. Drágán Tzankov), which used to be "newspaper for the Bulgarian interests" [*vestnik za bâlgarskite interesî*]. Usually mentioned in connection with its pro-Turkish and pro-governmental positions, *Turtziya* was at the same time abounding in examples of Bulgarian nationalism and in many cases it was aggressively defending Bulgarian interests by anti-Greek, anti-Romanian or anti-Serbian writings. An article rejecting any possibility of a union between the Bulgarians and the Romanians insisted that "the wise, honest and patriotic Bulgarian people⁶⁸ would never accept living under Romanian administration and ended pathetically with the appeal "For the sake of preserving our honor, let us remain forever Bulgarians!!"⁶⁸ The same newspaper published an article preaching for "the fusion of all Bulgarian populations of the Ottoman Empire."⁶⁹ It fervently praised Christianity and, in an article combating atheism, it argued that science was "profoundly Christian" and that "all the greatest scientists were Christians."⁷⁰ Contemporary scholars trying to prove that the leading *turcophiles* among the Bulgarians were in fact true Bulgarian patriots easily find evidence to support this thesis.⁷¹

It should be added that anti-Greek or anti-Serbian writings, such as those that appeared in *Turtziya*, corresponded at the same time to the Ottoman foreign policy and to the interests of the national movements of some of the peoples living within the empire like the Bulgarians and the Albanians (to mention only cases in the Balkans). The *Tanzimat* propaganda for Ottoman patriotism and unity was trying to incorporate and appease nationalisms, not to oppose them openly. Bulgarian or Albanian nationalism were to a large extent compatible with "Ottomanism" and vice versa. "The fusion of the interests" was not necessarily an empty phrase.

68 *Turtziya*, no. 4, March 15, 1869.

69 *Turtziya*, no. 44, December 20, 1869.

70 *Turtziya*, no. 2, March 2, 1869.

71 Todev (1999); Todev (2003).

TANZIMAT PROPAGANDA IN TRANSLATION

The fact that *Tanzimat* Ottomanism envisaged a double loyalty, that it allowed self-identification not only with the state but also with a specific community is reflected also in the multilingual propaganda of that time. The first priority was to make the propaganda understandable, and newspapers and magazines editors made efforts to write in simple and comprehensible language. In addition, the propaganda was addressed not only to a multireligious and multiethnic but obviously also a multilingual public and the authorities did their best to reach this public. Already the first official newspaper of the Ottoman state, *Takvim-i vekai*, was designed as a multilingual one. The authorities began to publish separate editions of the newspaper in different languages: first and most durably in French (*Le Moniteur Ottoman*), that had to serve the tasks of propaganda abroad and among foreigners at home, as well as among subjects who knew French. For internal use some newspaper issues were published also in Greek, Armenian, Arab or even Persian translations.⁷² This policy took a much more developed form in the provincial (*vilayet*) newspapers. Approximately half of them were published in Turkish and, parallel to it, in the other most used language of the province – Arab, Greek, Armenian, Bulgarian or Serbian. Some *vilayet* newspapers were published (at least for some time) in three (*Edirne*) or even four languages (*Selanik*). In many *vilayets*, mainly in Anatolia and in the "Albanian" *vilayets* in the Balkans, the official newspapers were published only in Turkish.⁷³

Comparison between the original and the translated texts in these bilingual editions makes visible the impossibility of creating a common "Ottoman" identity for all subjects.⁷⁴ In the case of the Bulgarian translations "Muslims," and in many cases also "Ottomans," was usually translated simply as Turks, the Sublime State [*Devlet-i Aliye*], i.e., the Ottoman Empire, as Turkey, etc. In some cases the text was intentionally modified and "adapted" according to the deeply rooted stereotypes of the respective public – Muslims or non-Muslims. For example in a Turkish text the "army" could be praised as the "glorious and sacred Muslim army" [*şan ve şerifi muslim olan asker*] but it appeared in the Bulgarian translation without any adjective.⁷⁵

Still, one should not look only for the failures in the "translations." The main messages of the official propaganda such as those about the fatherland and the sultan, about the common interests and against foreign influences could be successfully transmitted via non-Turkish texts. Even for the non-Turkish nationalists, there was no reason to object to a large part of the writings in the official press – the ideas of equality, justice, education and prosperity were

72 Koloğlu (1982), pp. 32–43; Yazıcı (1983), pp. 51–65.

73 Varhk (1985); Kocabaşoğlu, Birinci (1995).

74 See in this regard the pioneering work of Johann Strauss: Strauss (2002).

75 *Tuna/Dunav*, no. 486, June 24, 1870.

shared dreams, even if there were many disappointments with respect to their realization. The opposition to "foreign" interests and interventions was also part of a wide consensus.

Clear cases when the Turkish language was considered an identity marker were relatively rare at that time and the authorities insisted only on the practical need to know it. For example the law on the provincial city councils demanded that its members should be able to express themselves in Turkish (*türkçe tekmil edebilmek*).⁷⁶ The text of the 1876 Constitution (art. 18) that is often quoted as "declaring Turkish as the official language"⁷⁷ in fact demanded its knowledge for appointments in the state administration. To a certain extent this was probably a manoeuvre, but the 20th-century obsession with the Turkish language was still ahead of the *Tanzimat* politicians.

One of the first fields where the preeminence of the Turkish language was underlined was education. Even in the Lyceum of Galatasaray, the first among the subjects of the curriculum was Turkish.⁷⁸ The Turkish language was introduced as a subject in non-Muslim schools with the Education Law of 1869 and later regulations reinforced this requirement.⁷⁹ The role of the non-Turkish languages began to decrease even as a propaganda tool. Bilingualism of the local press proved to be of transitory nature and already in the 1880s there was a trend of renouncing the second language in the *vilayet* newspapers. In this way, already under Abdulhamid II, Ottomanist propaganda became not only more Islamist, but also more "Turkish."

REJECTING AND ... ACCEPTING OTTOMANISM

Even if Ottomanism was "still born" politically,⁸⁰ even if it was a "complete failure in the European provinces,"⁸¹ it survived intellectually. Arguments, phrases and clichés invented by the official propaganda of the *Tanzimat* period have survived to the present day. One could detect it in the "Ottomanist" anachronisms pervading many works on Ottoman history. Thus, a popular version of the Turkish national historiography claims that the different peoples lived "for centuries under the same roof without any problem" and even "like brothers," however, due mainly to foreign interventions, they had suddenly turned into enemies.⁸² In fact things happened in the opposite or-

76 Art. 18 of the *Vilayet belediye kanunu* from 27 N 1294, *Düstur*, (1299=1881/2), vol. IV, p. 538.

77 Gencer (1978).

78 "Reglement Organique de Lycée Imperial" (Galatasay), art. 4, in: Aristarch! (1874), vol. III, p. 316.

79 Kushner (1977), p. 93.

80 Ortaylı (1999), p. 154.

81 *Encyclopedia of nationalism...*, 2000, vol. II, p. 388.

82 "aynı çatı altında yüzyıllarca sorunsuz yaşamış halkların kanlı-bıçaklı düşman haline gelmeleri...": http://www.devletarsivleri.gov.tr/yayin/osmanli/arsivciliktarihi/00003_sunus.htm.

der – massacres following attempts at achieving political independence took place first and, in an effort to prevent them, the discourse about the Ottoman brotherhood was forged. In such a way, even if Turkish nationalism had defeated and replaced "Ottomanism" politically, the idealized interpretation of the Ottoman past in a big part of the present day Turkish historiography still makes use of the clichés of the Ottomanist propaganda.

I would even go further and argue that Ottomanism exercised a certain influence on the national doctrines it sought to combat. The differences between the national doctrines elaborated within and outside the Ottoman space should not be overestimated, because the role of the emigration in the national movements made the differences between these two types of cases less pronounced. Still a comparison between national doctrines forged outside the Ottoman space (the Greek *Megáll Idea* or the Serbian *Nacertanije*) and within it (among Bulgarians, Albanians, Macedonians) could be insightful in this sense. One could detect some influences of the Ottoman propaganda in the latter cases, particularly the presence of "Ottomanist" rhetoric in the Bulgarian, Macedonian or Albanian national discourses (such as insistence on equality, justice, tolerance, different nations and faiths living like brothers, etc).⁸³ Obviously catchwords like "brotherhood," "equality" and "justice" appeared in many contexts, various national movements included. However in many cases almost identical phrases turn up in the "Ottomanist" and the national discourses, the former most probably serving as a source for the latter.

The case of Vasil Levski (1837–1873), the most important leader of the Bulgarian independence movement, could illustrate the argument. In his letters and a few other writings one finds expressions on equality, brotherhood between different peoples and universality of law, that almost literally coincide with the formulas used in the official Ottoman discourse. Levski described the final goal of the Bulgarian national revolution in words that sound very similar to the Ottomanist propaganda: "The Turkish *çorbacılık* (here in the meaning of arbitrary governance) should give place to the consent, the brotherhood and the perfect equality (*sâglasieto, bratstvoto i sâvârshenoto ravenstvo*) between Bulgarians, Turks, Jews, etc. *mezhdû bulgari, turtzi, evrei i pr.*"⁸⁴ The beginning of the phrase left aside, the rest could be found in contemporary official or pro-governmental newspapers. "The consent, the brotherhood and the perfect equality" between different peoples reminds some of the most popular clichés of the official propaganda. In a letter to Lyuben Karavelov (January 28, 1871) Levski wrote that "Bulgarians, Turks, Jews, etc. will be equal in rights [...] all will be under one universal law."⁸⁵ Contrary to other national leaders, especially to those living in Romania, Levski never made

83 See Tchavdar Marinov's contribution in this volume.

84 Quoted after: Simeonova (2003), p. 618.

85 Simeonova (2003), p. 208.

anti-Jewish remarks.⁸⁶ On other occasions too Levski underlined the principle of the universality of the law, irrespective of nationality. In another letter to Karavelov (July 25, 1872) he said that the goal of the Bulgarian revolutionary organization was "brotherhood with everybody" regardless of "faith and nationality" [*bratstvo sa sekigo, bez da gledame na viara i na národnost*].⁸⁷ Brotherhood was professed in precisely these terms by the official Ottoman press. The expression "regardless of faith and nationality" is the usual translation in Bulgarian of "*din ve mezheb bakilmayarak*" [regardless of religion and sect].⁸⁸ Surprisingly at first glance, such parallels show that the political adversaries of the Ottoman Empire adopted what they found acceptable in its official propaganda.

Similarities are not limited to mere phrasing. Levski shared many views expressed by the *turcophiles*, especially when pleading for the independence of the Bulgarian national movement from foreign states and interests. In this regard he severely criticized and opposed the *emigres* in Bucharest.⁸⁹ It is not a coincidence that Levski's ideas had much greater impact on the moderate Bulgarian elite, than the newspapers of the radical emigration. As a consequence he managed to attract in the revolutionary committees many local notables, who otherwise were also members of the local administrative councils and mixed courts.

In conclusion, let us stress again that "Ottomanism" is a technical term describing the identity politics of the *Tanzimat* leaders, an analytical tool that should be used with precaution. Although well known, the concept has its cognitive limits. It would be misleading to talk about a "doctrine of Ottomanism" as something coherent and to discuss seriously who and to what extent was accepting it, given the fact that no such doctrine had been formulated during the *Tanzimat* period. To consider "the union of the elements," "the fusion of the interests" or "the different peoples living in harmony" as an ambition to make "one single Ottoman nation" is an over-interpretation. The occasional use of the expression "Ottoman nation/Ottoman *millet*" has been intentionally transformed only in later nationalist interpretations into "one single Ottoman nation." Authorities never aimed to create such a nation and there is no reason to claim that they had "failed" in this regard. It is easy to see the root of all these anachronisms – the term "Ottomanism" was introduced by people thinking in national terms. The same is true for the majority of the scholars who studied it. Many of them use the very notion of "one single Ottoman nation" as a means to discredit the *Tanzimat* project and/or the Ottoman Empire.

Another source of confusion is the parallel existence of different discourses

86 Todorova (1995).

87 Simeonova (2003), p. 73.

88 E.g.: *Makedoniya*, no. 11, February 11, 1867.

89 Genchev (1987), pp. 89–90.

about the future of the peoples in the Ottoman Empire during the *Tanzimat* era. Some foreigners at that time suggested that the Ottoman State could be strengthened only by melting all its subjects into one nation. State authorities and their propaganda were not only more cautious and realistic in what concerns the practical implementation of such a project – they were reluctant to accept the very concept of nation. The *turcophiles* among the Christians were seeing Ottoman unity as a supranational union, as a compromise serving their own nation or community. In this polyphony some contemporary scholars have chosen to discern only one voice – the one that is closer to their own perception of identity in terms of nations.

Another basis for misinterpretation is that the *Tanzimat* project for promoting the unity of all Ottoman subjects was anything but coherent. The official propaganda during the *Tanzimat* era was based on universal values like equality, justice and tolerance. But when the promoters of "Ottomanism" had to answer the question of who they were, the answer was "Muslim" and later increasingly "Muslim and Turk." In "the Union of the Elements" this was "the Fundamental Element." Non-Muslims who were accepting the idea of preserving and even strengthening the Ottoman Empire presented themselves as Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians and Jews. A few months after the 1908 Revolution these two types of understanding of "Ottomanism" – as an attachment to the state and a union of different peoples and as an identification with Islam and Turkishness – clashed. Already at that time, in the debate with the newly born Turkish nationalism, the advocates of "Ottomanism" gradually adopted the way of thinking and the vocabulary of the nationalists.

As for the non-Muslims, they did not adopt the self-identification of "Ottomans" and only for practical reasons (taxation, property rights) the status of "Ottoman subject" gradually became important. At the same time during the *Tanzimat* era many non-Muslims began to refer to the Ottoman State as fatherland, and ordinary people demonstrated clear interest and attachment to the person of the reigning sultan. It was not "the nation" or "the people" but the state and the monarch that were the linking elements in *Tanzimat* Ottomanism.

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