

The Attitude of Ottoman Empire Towards the Partitions of Poland and Re-Independence Process

Osmanlı Devletinin Polonya'nın Bölünüşü ve Yeniden Bağımsızlaşma Sürecine Yönelik Tutumu

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Abstract

After the 18th century, the Ottoman-Polish relations were shaped according to the European states' perspective of Poland. The Ottomans, who opposed the partition plan of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria, started to support Poland's struggle for independence. For more than a century, Poland remained under the sovereignty of these states. After World War I, Poland regained its independence.

The Ottomans were one of the first states to officially recognize Poland. Therefore, it closely followed the process of Poland's regaining its independence. In the first stage, mutual consulates were opened and negotiations with bureaucrats were accelerated. During this period, the Polish refugees in the Ottoman Empire were allowed to return to their countries and it was decided to continue the friendly relations. In this study, the perspective of the Ottoman administrators/rulers and the press towards Poland's period of partitions and re-independence process are evaluated by examining *Servet-i Fünûn* journal and other sources.

Keywords

Ottoman, Partitions of Poland, Independence, Press, Diplomatic Relations.

Özet

Osmanlı-Polonya ilişkileri 18. yüzyıldan sonra Avrupalı devletlerin Polonya'ya bakış açısına göre şekillenmiştir. Rusya, Prusya ve Avusturya'nın Polonya'yı paylaşım planına karşı çıkan Osmanlılar, Polonya'nın bağımsızlık mücadelesini desteklemeye başladılar. Bir asrı aşkın sürede Polonya bu devletlerin hâkimiyetinde kalmıştır. I. Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra da Polonya yeniden bağımsızlığını kazanmıştır.

Osmanlılar Polonya'yı resmen tanıyan ilk devletlerden biridir. Bu yüzden Polonya'nın yeniden bağımsızlığını elde etme sürecini takından takip etmiştir. İlk etapta karşılıklı konsolosluklar açılmıştır. Bu süreçte bürokratlarla görüşmeler hızlandırılmıştır. Bu dönemde Osmanlı Devleti'nde bulunan Polonyalı mültecilerin ülkelerine dönmeleri sağlanmış ve dostluk ilişkilerinin devam ettirilmesi kararı alınmıştır. Bu çalışmada Polonya'nın bölüşülmesi, yeniden bağımsız olma süreci ve Osmanlı yöneticileri ile basınının bu sürece bakış açısı *Servet-i Fünûn*'dan ve diğer kaynaklardan istifade edilerek değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler

Osmanlı, Polonya, Bağımsızlık, Basın, Diplomatik ilişkiler.

Introduction

The Ottoman-Polish relations date back to the 15th century. These relations continued uninterruptedly until the third dismemberment/partition period in 1795. Thus, according to some claims,

Özel Sayı “Polonya ve Türk Dünyası”, Kasım 2019

Poland has taken the title of sending the highest number of envoys to the Ottoman Empire. Until the early 18th century, Poland had been present with their envoys in the ceremonies of accession to the throne of the Ottoman Sultans (Topaktaş, 2006, p. 377). With the effect of the Wars of Succession (1722-1738) in Poland, no envoy was designated from Poland to Istanbul for a while. However, the Ottoman State followed the developments in Poland in this period through their diplomats (Topaktaş, 2015, pp. 315-317). For example; In 1736, Ibrahim Müteferrika was appointed as an ambassador for carrying out secret contacts in Poland. Müteferrika observed the confusion of Poland with one-to-one contact and directed the Ottoman bureaucracy to determine Polish policies (Afyoncu, Önal, 2016, pp. 106-107). Similarly, developments in Poland were closely kept abreast of during the embassy period of Kapıcıbaşı Mehmed Ağa in 1757-1758 (Topaktaş, 2007, pp. 203-225).

Another issue as a determinant of the relationship between the two countries in the 19th century was the refugee issue. Upon the revolution attempt and subsequent revolutions in 1830 and 1848, numerous Polish were accepted as political prisoners and found asylum in the Ottoman State. These refugees were talented people such as soldiers, doctors, chemists, engineers, veterinarians, and craftsman. They contributed greatly and had a positive impact on the Ottoman modernization (Gümüş, 2015, pp. 363-387). AntoniLinski, who took the name Iskender Pasha, Zarzycki who took the name of Osman Bey, and Aleksander Lassi, who took the name of Mehmet Bey, were among those who had important positions in the Ottoman State bureaucracy (Gebert, 1963, pp. 103-109).

After the Treaty of Karlowits in 1699, the Ottoman-Poland relations were more peaceful due to the increasing Russian effect on Poland. With the increasing dominance of Russia over Poland, the territorial integrity of Poland and its administration in the Eastern Europe became of vital importance for the Ottoman State (Topaktaş, 2010, p. 537-538). Therefore, Ottoman State supported Poland to stand as a regional power against Russia. Thus, it is possible to state that the policy of the Ottoman State about Poland followed a pragmatic discourse.

The Perspectives of the Ottomans on Poland's Partition Process

While the Ottoman bureaucracy/rulers followed the developments in Poland through their diplomats working under different posts, the Ottoman intellectuals analyzed the situation in Poland by means of making publications in various newspapers and magazines. Particularly in the 19th century, Poland was given a wide coverage in the Ottoman press. Based on the general view of Ottoman press, the Ottoman-Poland relations were quite ancient and longstanding. Although the views on Polish history and geography were presented in the articles, the topic of the most interest was the dismemberment of Poland by the great states. Among these, according to an article written in 1915 titled “The Polish and Poland Issue (Leh ve LehistanMeselesi)”; Poland was partitioned for 3 times, recreated for 3 times, collapsed for 3 times, and experienced revolution for 3 times as well. Once, Poland was a grand country. It governed a vast area reaching from Gdansk to the Black Sea. Even it was a magnificent state which rescued Vienna from the siege of Kara Mustafa. However, it was a region deprived of natural borders, trade, industry, and capital. Due to the maladministration of the kings, and the

Özel Sayı “Polonya ve Türk Dünyası”, Kasım 2019

lack of a class for the development of the country, it couldn't reach to a real grandness. Thus, “The Magnificent Republic” turned into a “woman married with several husbands”. Like a ghost government, Poland was acting as if it was alone in the world, and as if it would never confront any enemy other than the Zaporozhian Cossacks and the weak armies of the Tzars in Moscow. However, its neighbors would become stronger gradually, creating the Prussia of Frederick the Great, the reign of Maria Theresa, and the Russia of Catherina II. The countries, which were richer, more armed, and particularly more powerful than Poland, would sooner or later benefit from the weakness of this ‘republican’ reign. It was started through the protection of the Polish Protestants, and the country was shared for three times. The first one was conducted in 1772 among three countries, the second one was between two governments in 1793, and the third one was employed among three countries in 1795. In this year, the Royal Republic of Poland was wiped off the European map with a last coup (Edebiyat-ı Umumiye Mecmuası, 1915, Issue: 3, p. 32).

The 1831 and 1863 insurrections were also mentioned in the periodicals dealing with the situation in Poland. According to these periodicals, the insurrection of 1863 rendered Poland more open to the Russians. The Polish people, who were running after a dream into a revolution, were cheated by France. The third revolution was ended with the termination of whoever and whatever about autonomy, and numerous individuals were exiled to Siberia. As of 1915, there were 30 million Polish living in the world. 13 million of them are in Russia, 2 million Polish in Lithuania and Russia Minor, 4 million Polish in Poznan, 2 million of them around Silesia, and 4 million Polish are in Galicia and Moravia. The remaining 4 million of them are living in the countries around and in Brazil. Furthermore, a country, whose population was 13 million, has increased by 17 million in such a short period of time i.e. 123 years. For the Polish, the reign of Russians was like a hell, while the dominance of the Habsburgs or the Germans was like a heaven. It was because the Polish were living more freely in Vienna and they were able to be parliament members. As per the Russian dominance, they faced difficulties in religious, economic, military, and civilian administration activities. When their schools were shut down, 75 thousand students were dropped out of their schools to the streets (Edebiyat-ı Umumiye Mecmuası, 1915, Issue: 3, p. 33). Hence, some publications of the period made a kind of “German flattery” with the effect of Ottoman-Russian relations. This is a remarkable point. Germany was among the states that occupied Poland, but the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire had not yet reached the brink of a crisis with this country. Moreover, the color of the alliances changed over time. Nevertheless, the same media organs also expressed different opinions about the Germans.

According to a report in the Servet-i Fünûn periodical, which criticized the Russians very harshly, Russia accused Polish Jews of treason. The Russians accused the Jews of working for German soldiers and held some of them hostage and executed them in any indication of German support. Therefore, “this procedure” was described as an attitude worthy of the Russians. (Servet-i Fünûn, 1915, Issue: 1245, p. 366). Similar views continued in the following years. For example; In 1916, two American members of the Walkut committee, led by billionaire Rockefeller, explored the economic situation of occupied Poland. The report stated that the German government provided all kinds of facilities, however during the Russian occupation of Poland, the

Özel Sayı “Polonya ve Türk Dünyası”, Kasım 2019

destruction of thousands of factories and looms ended the trade. In fact, the Russians allegedly burned grains and cereals down everywhere, people were suffering from food shortages. The Germans came to their rescue. (Servet-i Fünûn, 1916, Issue: 1289, p. 108).

According to the analysis in Servet-i Fünûn, which closely followed the partition of Poland, the current situation of Poland was an exemplary. The functioning of the assembly they established after the unification with Lithuania soon facilitated the intervention of neighboring states in Poland. Therefore, Poland was the most vivid example of the heedlessness, faction and misery of the 20th century. Moreover, many states were inexperienced in drawing lessons from this influential example. Polish opinions can be summarized as follows:

The Poles, the most sensitive and intelligent group of Slavic people, have developed in literature, poetry and industry and have left many works. Their kindness and subtlety in their language, the nobility in their ideas, the solemnity and simplicity of their men's movements, the freshness and seriousness of their women, their selective behaviors in their conversations and their extremely natural kindness point to a Latinism in the midst of Slavic and Germanicity. Yes! This oppressed, this victim nation is brave. It is movable. Bouncer and hero! With the exception of Galicia under Austrian rule, the Polish and Russian prisoners have been subjected to various tortures. They endured all kinds of difficulties for the preservation of their nations and languages. It is enough to look at Waclaw Sieroszewski's literary works to see how much they can resist the pressures. Think about it! Which force can resist these 20 million people who are banned from oppression and forced languages and want to be Germanized? Poles would rather die than live under these conditions. Moreover, the children they leave behind infuse a hatred against the enemy. They never surrender their souls without organizing their children against the enemy. In the 20th century, which was the age of civilization, everything changed but the spirit of this nation did not change. A Polish can not be Russian or not a German. He might be servile or captive, but he is still Polish. (Servet-i Fünûn, 1911, No: 1051, pp. 140-141).

The Ottoman press, which was examined within the sample of this study, also questioned who should rule Poland, which was under the sovereignty of many states, and answered this question to the extent required by the policy adopted by the Ottoman administration. For example, it was asked to date that the Polish are in need of government, but who will be their ruler. There is no one else suitable to Poland other than the Polish (Edebiyat-ı Umumiye Mecmuası, 1915, Issue: 3, p. 33). Periodicals of the period explained the loss of independence of Poland with internal confusion with the attitude of neighboring states. This thinking has continued in the Republic of Turkey. Accordingly, in Poland, which was under enemy invasion, Polish patriots were engaged in internal reform. Even if they prepared a constitution in 1791, but it was too late. Russia and Prussia began to divide Poland with the fear of a possible constitution and the spread of the French Revolution (Ayın Tarihi, 1927, No: 14). Therefore, the general comments of Ottoman intellectuals against Poland were that Poland should be with them. Because Russia was a common enemy of both states and only with the independence of Poland could Russia's Balkan and European policies, which also concern the Ottoman Empire, be prevented.

Özel Sayı “Polonya ve Türk Dünyası”, Kasım 2019

The journal of *Tearüf-i Muslim*, issued by Tatar Islamists who emigrated from Tsarist Russia to Istanbul, interpreted the breaks in Polish history and the current situation of Poland through Islamic unity. According to this; the Islamic world established close relations with the Polish people in many periods and watched out the Polish people. Whatever the Polish people lived in the name of the problem originated from the Russians. The only authority that came to their support during the times when the Polish people were stuck was the Caliphate. Although in some periods, the Polish people were forgiven by the Muslims, even though they were walking up to the Caliphate. In order to protect Polish people against Russian threat, Muslims did not hesitate to wage war against the Russians. Although Sobieski came into play in the siege of Vienna, the Ottoman State suffered a defeat, but the main loser was Poland. The Russians are eternal enemies at the expense of both communities. However, the Ottomans could not resist the Russians at a time when they did not have enough power and Poland was abolished. With the influence of the Russians, the Polish and Muslims once very close were alienated. Muslims, whose fathers shed blood for the Polish, remained insensitive to the Polish, as did the Polish to the history of their ancestors. Whereas, Islam is the main way of establishing relations with the Polish. Therefore, the Russians are trying to keep the two communities apart by keeping the religious affairs under control. The same method is applied in the language issue and it is forbidden for the Polish to learn Turkish. Because there are around 50 million Turkish-speaking people around Lehistan. If the Polish people speak this language, it will be very easy for Muslims to reunite with the Polish people. Thus, the spread of Islam in Poland will be more possible. But the Russians insist on closing all kinds of communication channels... In the rest of the article, Adam Mickiewicz, one of the Polish national poets, said, “The Polish people always prefer to breathe their last breath as a common man with the Ottomans rather than living as a general with the Russians II. Katerina’s alleged “They (Muslims and the Polish) are two nations. However, they are united in their interests, and their lives are also common. (Tearüf-i Muslimin, 1910, Issue. 26, pp. 23-26). In this article, there is an intense anti-Russian stance, and it has a direct relation to the treatment of the Russians to the Tatars. On the relationship of Islam and Poland, a quite romantic characterization was made.

Poland's Re-Independence Process

Until the third partition of Poland, in other words 1795, a Polish representative was found in Istanbul. But they were not permanent embassies. The regaining of Poland's independence was reflected in the Ottoman press as follows:

“Today we are facing one of the most important events of the last century. Such an event would have been completely irrational if it had been predicted by the soothsayer before 1914. This is the establishment of the Kingdom of Poland.”(Servet-i Fünûn, 1916, Issue: 1325, p. 294).

Therefore, the process of regaining independence of Poland was considered a great success, although it seemed impossible. Moreover, it was pointed out that this success will change the balance in Europe. Accordingly, the congress to convene after the First World War while discussing nations, tribes, governments, and the issues of law and independence agenda items, Poland would necessarily come up. Thus, a major change in the map of Europe would take place after the war. (Servet-i Fünûn, 1916, Issue. 1325, pp. 295-296).

Özel Sayı “Polonya ve Türk Dünyası”, Kasım 2019

The victory of the Germans against the Russians in the Battle of Tannenberg in 1914 was described as an improvement of exultation in *Servet-i Fünûn*. Accordingly, Germans and Hungarians were happy to celebrate the the defeat of Russians in Poland after a long lasting war, in a similar manner Ottoman State and society should also celebrate this victory. First of all, the Ottomans had a "comrade in arms relationship" with Germany and Austria, secondly there was a same common enemy with Poland. Hence, the victory of "friends and allies" in Poland, was considered to be beneficial for Germans and Hungarians as well as for the Ottomans in East, West, North and South i.e. all over the world. (*Servet-i Fünûn*, 1914, Issue. 1229, p. 99). In this process, it was tried to inform the Ottoman public by making use of European newspapers. (*Servet-i Fünûn*, 1915, Issue 1230, p. 126). Moreover, in the memory of Romuald Traufft, the leader of the Polish National Committee executed by Russia in 1864, the monument erected in Warsaw in 1916 and the commemoration held on this occasion also appeared in the newspapers. (*Servet-i Fünûn*, 1916, No. 1312, p. 148).

After Poland gained its independence, an invitation was made by the commander-in-chief of the Polish State Piłsudski to improve relations (BOA. BEO. 4555/34552, 1919, p.1). This call of Poland was welcomed in the consultation during the Ottoman Foreign Affairs. However, as the political and military situation of Poland had not yet been clarified, the Ottoman administrators were cautious (BOA. BEO. 4555/34552, 1919, p. 2). In the early periods, Monsieur Witold de Fodka was in contact with the Ottoman administration as an minister-envoy. He has been appointed as a "mission special". That is, the definition of the task has not been clearly defined yet (BOA. BEO. 4611/345820, 1919, p. 1). In 1919, a representative office was established in Istanbul under the name of "Delegation of the Polish Government to Babiâli", herewith diplomatic relations were developed. Until the foundation of Republic of Turkey i.e. in 1923, that relationship was carried out by this representative office in Istanbul. Witold Jodko Narkiewicz served there until 1921. Another prominent Polish representative of the period, Tadeusz Gasztowtt, has established close relations with the Party of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki Fırkası) and supported the Young Turk Movement (Jön Türkler) and carried out press and broadcast activities in Istanbul. In 1924, the first permanent embassy was established in Ankara (Topaktaş, 2015, pp. 324-325). Therefore, institutional relations did not follow a systematic course until 1924. Even in 1921, Poland applied for the mining privilege in the Ottoman lands, but it was rejected because it was a newly established state (BOA. BEO. 4606/345439, 1921, p. 1). After 1924, treaty of commerce were made between the two countries and mutual friendship relations were improved. In this period, Polish history and political life were also closely followed. In 1923, Treaty of Friendship was made between Poland and Turkey (Topaktaş, 2015, p. 326). This treaty has been a symbol of peace and brotherhood between the Second Polish Republic and the Republic of Turkey and two countries' citizens. Thus, 90 years later, in 2013, this treaty was honored by the Polish embassy in Istanbul with a major ceremony and cultural organization. (Mierzwa, 2015, p.7).

In 1923, a commercial treaty was made between the two countries. In these early years, football matches were organized to strengthen friendship. One of them was made in 1925 and the match result was a draw. A German referee conducted the match. Because of the match, Polish fans came to Istanbul. The match

Özel Sayı “Polonya ve Türk Dünyası”, Kasım 2019

was made under the name of Istanbul-Krakow teams (Resimli Mecmua, 1925, No: 16). During this period, even the Polish constitution was included in periodicals (History of the Month, Issue: 37, 1927, pp. 3087-3089) and thus many developments in Poland were followed. In addition to that, news and articles about the history and existence of Turks in Poland were also published. (Asar-i Nisvan, 1925, No. 10, pp. 57-58). This was also the period when Polish prisoners, who were Polish but registered as Russian, returned to their countries of origin, created an intense traffic of diplomacy (Altıntaş, 2017, pp. 29-46). During this period, the following declaration, which was presented by the Turkish and Muslim groups living in Poland to the Polish government, is quite remarkable. This declaration is one of the best examples of ancient and longstanding Turkish and Polish relations. This declaration issued in Sebilürreşad is as follows:

"The Turkish Army's brilliant victories against the enemy, have filled our hearts with happiness and supremely formed the opinion that Turkey is returning to its former brilliant and glorious era. Our happiness increased with the news of a treaty was made between Turkey and Poland. This situation will have a paramount importance for Poland. Because, it will ensure the reestablishment of cordial relationship dating back to ancient times, between our homeland, Poland, and first Islamic State i.e. Turkey. While faithful to our religion, we are committed to Poland with all our hearts. In 1673 and 1679, the Polish administration provided us with all kinds of privileges and facilities it granted to its nobles. Forming a troop named as Tatar Cavalry in the former army of Poland, we carried the Islamic sign in our flag. We have continued our source of pride traditions, even when the new Republic of Poland was established. Hence, in 1920, the Tatar Cavalry raised the Golden Crescent again and fought with the Golden Salib (Cross) against the invaders. With all these developments, we express our loyalty to the most sincere feelings towards our reputable republic (Sebilürreşad, 1923, No: 538-539, p. 152).

As is seen, the Tatar Islam has held an important place in the qualification of bilateral relations of Poland, not only in the Ottoman Empire but also in the Turkish Republic.

Conclusion

The Ottoman-Poland relations have a long history. Russia had been influential in shaping the perspectives of both countries about each other. Although the relations were interrupted for over a century period, due to the loss of independence, Poland, which regained its independence after the I. World War has been in an attempt to establish good relationship with the Ottoman State and the Republic of Turkey. The late Ottoman period rulers and founders of the Republic of Turkey have approached with a equally positive outlook to the Poland. Poland's Period of Partitions and re-independence process were closely monitored by the Ottoman press and the media of the period continuously brought this issue to the agenda with the effect of anti-Russian opposition. In this regard, apart from many journals especially *Servet-i Fünûn* spent vigorous efforts and became one of the Poles' voices in the Ottoman Empire.

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Özel Sayı “Polonya ve Türk Dünyası”, Kasım 2019

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APPENDIX:

1- Polish Cavalries



2- Polish Cavalry



3- Polish Consulate Staff



Jules Dziduszewski	Head Clerk and the chief of Consulate Branch
Th. Papasian	Adviser
Mehmed Ali Bey	Turkish Clerk
Michel Bielinski	Clerk
Georges Truchimuski	Cashier
Sophie de Chirico	Assistant
Elisabeth Prawdzic Heyman	Chancery Director



5- Turkish-Polish Football Match



6- A Map of Silesia (Ottoman Archives)

