

## THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBERAL THOUGHT IN TURKEY

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From the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, the traditional structure of the Ottoman Empire underwent a great transformation not only in its political thought. Some Western origin liberal ideas begin to enter the empire and to influence it in this period. However, while liberalism was living its golden period in the European world, the Ottomans were unaware of this great current shaping the era. On the other hand, after glorious Ottoman armies suffered a series of defeats at the hands of their European adversaries, the rulers of the empire were obliged to change and modernize the equipment and training of their armies. It was this reform period when the Ottomans acquainted liberal thoughts. However, Ottoman meeting with the Western liberal ideas took place in an indirect way. To begin with liberal ideas accessed the empire under the name of "reform" or "rennovation" or, with the expression of those days "tanzimat"(regulations), "islahat" ;(reform). The Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals inclined the idea of liberal state indirectly by recognizing these terms. In this respect, the advent of liberal ideas is not a new and rootless development in Turkey as many scholars think today. In fact, the first advent of liberal ideas in Turkey goes as far as first quarter of the eighteenth century and liberal ideas were considered as synonymous with the terms of "reform-modernization" for a long time.

The reform movements in the Ottoman Empire go back until the eighteenth century, the Tulip Era (1718-1730). From this period onwards, the Ottoman intellectuals began to question the situation of the empire. The eighteenth century reforms were prompted by the defeats on the Western front. Therefore, western-inspired reforms of the eighteenth century were largely confined to the military institutions. However, the Ottoman ruling staff who started their reform attempts with this main goal, accepted the necessity to reform other institutions and political thought of the state. [\(1\)](#)

In 1789 Selim III (1789-1807) ascended the Ottoman throne, when Europe was shaken by the French Revolution. Following the French Revolution nationalistic ideas began to penetrate into the Ottoman Empire, then reform became inevitable for the Ottomans. For this purpose, Selim III began to prepare a reform project. He issued a command to civil, military and religious dignitaries requesting them to set forth their views on the causes of the weakness of the empire, and their proposals for its reform. They presented their replies in the form of "layiha" (memorials). At the end three different views existed. Some of them sought to recover the military glories of the Ottoman golden age by reverting to its military methods. Then, the others demanded reconciliation of Frankish training and weapons with the existing military order. Finally, radical who believed that the old army was incapable of reform and urged the Sultan to set up a new one, trained, equipped and armed from the start along European lines. [\(2\)](#)

So the Sultan promulgated, in 1792 and 1793, a whole series of new instructions and regulations which came to be known collectively as the "Nizam-Cedid" (New Order). A new corps of regular infantry (Nizam-i Cedid Ordusu), trained and equipped on European lines was established. To finance this army, a special new treasury (Irâd-i Cedid Hazinesi) was set up. In administration some disciplinary measures were taken. In diplomatic relations the balance of power policy began to be pursued. Regular and permanent Ottoman embassies were established in the major European capitals such as London, Paris, Vienna and Berlin relations were accepted in diplomacy. However, Selim's reign was the period when the old and new institutions lived spontaneously. This caused a great opposition against Selim III. At the other hand, the idea of reform still existed among some statesmen, and the Ottoman embassies in Europe, founded during Selim's period served as channels of transmission through which Western ideas went on entering into the empire. (3)

Mahmud II who ascended the Ottoman throne in 1808, continued the reform programme that was started by Selim III. At the first days of his reign, Sened-i Ittifak (Document of Agreement) was signed. With this document the Sultan's sovereign power was limited for the first time in the Ottoman history, therefore it was an important document, although it was never practiced. (4) On June 15, 1826 Mahmud II destroyed Janissary corps, thus he set Ottoman reform on a new course. He embarked on a great programme of reforms; in them he laid down the main lines along which later Tanzimat reformers were to follow. Mahmud set up a new army, to be known as Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediye (the Victorious Soldiers of Muhammed). Military College, a significant institution which was going to play an important role in the Turkish political life, was established. (5)

Mahmud II gave special emphasis on centralization of all power in his own hands, and the elimination of all intermediate authorities, both in capital and in provinces. At the end, he suppressed local lords in the provinces, in Rumelia and Anatolia and succeeded in establishing direct central control over most areas. Only against the Mehmet Ali Pasha of Egypt was he ultimately unsuccessful. In fact this was one of the factors that forced him to reform the empire. (6)

Mahmud's desire to achieve increased centralization necessitated changes first of all in the structure of central government in Istanbul. There was an inclination towards modern cabinet government in the structure of central government. A Grand Vezir turned Prime Minister and became a coordinator of the activities of ministers. The office of the lieutenant of the grand vezir (Sada ret Kethudasi) was transformed into the Ministry of Interior (called first Ministry of Civil Administration Affairs, or Umur-u Mulkiye Nezaret-i, in 1836, and then, simply Ministry of Interior, or Nezaret-i Dahiliye). In addition, in 1836, the office of Reisu'l-kuttab was transformed into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Nezaret-i Hariciye). In 1836 the Ministry of Judicial Pleas (Nezaret-i Deavi), later called the Ministry of Justice was established. In 1839 Ministry of Trade (Nezaret-i Ticaret) was set up. The Imperial Treasury (Hazine-i Amire) was joined with the Imperial Mint (Darphane-i Amire), and they were transformed into the Ministry of Finance (Maliye Nezaret-i). Thus, the Council of Ministers (Meclis-i Vukela) was created under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. For the first time civil servants were divided into two separate

departments as domestic and foreign affairs. A regular salary system was established and this would reduce the officials' opportunity to take bribes and penal codes were issued for officials. Ranks and titles of officials were reorganized. Finally, the structure of a complex Ottoman bureaucratic hierarchy on modern lines were established in this period. So, Bab-i Ali, or what the Europeans called it the Sublime Porte was created. (7)

In addition to all these reforms, the Sultan established a series of advisory councils. In 1836 in order to execute military reforms the Deliberative Council of the Army (Dar-i Sura-yi Askeri) was set up. In 1838 the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances (Meclis-i Vala-yi Ahkam-i Adliye) was established. Even if not with method of election of its members, with regards of its regulations and its execution, this council can be regarded as the pioneer of the parliament in Turkey. It performed major tasks and was maintained up to now with different titles as "the Supreme Court of Appeal" and "the State Council". It developed in the line of separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers, and took its place in the Ottoman administration as high consultive organ. In addition to this council, several councils of ministries and city councils were established. At the end of the Tanzimat period, in the Ottoman administration, liberal institutions, which will be pioneers of the representative system and parliamentarism in Turkey in the future, were founded, even if they were limited in number. (9)

Another institution that was one of the sources of intellectual life of Tanzimat period was Tercume Odasi (Translation Office). Following the Greek Revolution in 1821, it was established to handle duties of translation and to train young Ottomans to replace the Greeks who had traditionally performed this function. It became major source not only of diplomats and educated bureaucrats but also of the new intelligentsia who was going to be creators of Tanzimat such as Sadik Rifat Pasha, Ali Pasha and Fuad Pasha. They were advocates of liberal thought and brought up from this office. When Mahmut II was died in 1839 the famous Tanzimat Decree which prepared the ground for liberal reforms in the empire was about to be proclaimed. (10) The principles of the Tanzimat Decree that was promulgated on November 3, 1839 made way for a constitutional state in Turkey for the first time. It was declared as a "hatt-i humayun" or imperial ordinance and it can be considered as a semi constitutional document. It embraces three important aspects taking the right of life, possession and honor of the Ottoman citizens under guarantee collecting taxes according to income recruitment on a regular basis. All of these items were going to be applied all Ottoman citizens whether Muslims or non Muslims. As a matter of fact all these principles show that liberalism that rose and developed in Europe begun to enter into the Ottoman Empire. Similar to the first liberal document of Europe, Magna Carta (1215) the Tanzimat Decree bears a liberal character since it is the first step towards constitutionalism in Turkey. The decree emphasizes the rights and duties of the citizens by guaranteeing their rights of life, honor and possession. With the right of property the Ottoman Empire passed the practice of private possession and at the same time confiscation and eschating were abolished. All of these renovations were significant turning point for the sake of liberal development within the Empire. With the proclamation of Reform Decree of

1856 (Islahat Fer mani) these rights were repeated and revised and secured a more exact expression. Moreover, with the Land Code (Arazi Kanunnamesi) of 1858, the right private possession became apparent. On the other hand, central and provincial advisory councils of the Tanzimat period mainly the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinance (Meclis-i Vala-yi Ahkami Adliye) served to spread liberalism in the empire. [\(11\)](#)

It is a fact that Tanzimat statesmen did not follow the patterns of England and France in their reforms efforts, while they were aiming to found a more liberal state structure. When multinational structure of the empire is taken into consideration, it is more likely that they took the models of Austria and Prussia which had authoritarian and heterogeneous state structure. While the individuals were protected against the state. The Ottoman statesmen were seeking the remedies for keeping all elements of the empire together. Therefore in their liberal attempts they pursued the patterns of Austria and Prussia which had the same state structure with the Ottoman Empire. Establishment of the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinance (Meclis-i Vala-yi Ahkam-i Adliye) was a typical exam for this matter. It was a synthesis of the Prussian & "Staatsrat" (State Council) and the Ottoman administration tradition. As a matter of fact Prussia and Austria adopted these councils from England and France. In brief Tanzimat statesmen were influenced by the liberal developments in Europe through Austria and Prussia and indirectly through England and France. This fact also shows that the statesmen of Tanzimat did not imitate the European ideas in a passive way but mixed their own views and made a synthesis. [\(12\)](#)

Along with the developments in administration understanding, there were some statesmen who advocated liberal ideas among the Ottomans. One of them was Sadık Rıfat Pasha who was the father of the idea of the Tanzimat Decree, and that revealed its theoretical aspects in his writings. Pasha introduced Western liberal views to the Empire through his famous booklet called "Mün-tehabat-ı Asar". He also recorded his observations during his embassy to Vienna in a booklet titled "Avrupa'nın Ahvaline Dair Risale" (A Booklet on Conditions of Europe). In this writings, Sadık Rıfat analyze the reasons for the European development. According to Sadık Rıfat for a civilized state, individuals security of life, possession and honor should be provided and law and justice should be the main principles of administration. He also noted that there was a freedom of press in Europe. He was the first Ottoman statesman who put forward a liberal understanding of state administration very different from an oriental state understanding. According to him "governments are for the public, but public is not for the state". He was also the first man in the Empire who mentioned about the natural rights of men and he considered protege as something contrary to the human nature (13). Various articles. Cavid Bey wrote first at Mecmua-i Fünun and the first person who Ottomans about the developments in science of statistics and also economy in Europe. His most important work was Ilm-i İktisat (Science of Economy) in four volumes. (21) Moreover, he had a book on statistics titled "İhsahiyat" that can be considered as the first Ottoman work on statistics. Cavid Bey, together with Rıza Tevfik and Ahmed Suayib, famous philosophers at that

times, published a review called "Review of Social and Economic Science" (Ulum-i Iktisadiyye ve Ictimaiyye Mecmuasi) that was the most important publication for liberal and positivist thought in Turkey between 1908 and 1910. Another important contribution of Cavid Bey was that he was the founder of Itibar-i Milli Bankasi, a national bank, (1917) with the aim of supporting private enterprise in the empire. All through the period of CUP government in which he undertook the post Ministry of Finance for over six years. Cavid Bey supported necessity of abolishment of capitulations and tried to secure the English and French acceptance on this issue in return for the Ottoman neutrality during the World War One. He criticized bitterly and he was one of the followers of Manchester School, to which many of famous liberal economists of the period were belonged in his writings, he expressed that the Ottoman progress could be possible only through Ottoman integration with the world economy, and that for this purpose foreign investment should enter into the empire. He was against the protectionism and believed in development of private enterprise in the empire. He supported that the empire should be a capitalist state. He emphasized the free trade by saying "practice of exchange of commercial goods, free from all kinds of obstacles of international trade is the essence of economy, even the law of economy."(22)

Another liberalist in the empire was Prince Sebahaddin. He was influenced largely by the Anglo-Saxon society structure, and supporter of La Play School, founder of Science Social, and Edmond Demolins, leading representative of this school. According to him, societies were divided into two categories as communitarian and particularist. In the former community, individuals were depending on their social groups and waiting everything from the state and society. In other type of community, individuals were trusting only their own power and will in the first place. Therefore, in these communities individuals were more independent, enterprising and productive. According to Prince Ottoman society should follow the second pattern. He defended individualism and decentralization for the Ottoman progress. He expressed his views in his works titled "Open Letters to the CUP" and "How Turkey to be saved?", and translated Edmond Demolins "Reasons For Progress of Anglo-Saxons" into Turkish.(23)

Prince Sebahaddin entered into competition of leadership with Ahmed Riza Bey in the CUP and in 1902 at the CUP, and founded the Ottoman Liberal Society as an opposition group against CUP. In 1906 he established Society of Individual Enterprise and Decentralization. After the promulgation of the second Constitution a strong opposition against the CUP government, their activities remained ineffective.

Another party founded during the first Constitution period was Freedom and Agreement Party. Ostensively, it had a liberal tendency, and supported decentralization and individualism of Prince Sebahaddin, but in reality, it was away from defending liberal ideas. It was constituted by the individuals who were alienated the CUP and had the inclination of minority nationalism. Therefore, in this respect, it is not a historical fact to accept this party as one of the exponents of liberal thought in the Ottoman Empire.(24)

During the years of 1914 and 1918 of the second Constitution period, national policy began to be pursued in economy and to be created a national bourgeoisie.

During the World War One when over one third of the territories were lost, CUP pursued a national policy in economy by using force.(25)

Consequently, the nineteenth century was the period when the liberal thought began its entrance into the empire. However, this was mainly a liberalism understood by the terms of reform and renovation. *It was considered as Ottomanism which straggled for the salvation of the Ottoman empire all through the XIXth century. It was a continuation of a thought which appeared from Tanzimat period onwards.* As a matter of fact first liberal Ottomans were at the game time exponents of Ottomanism Sadik Rifat Pasha, Mustafa Resid Pasha, Ali Pasha and Fuad Pasha were alike. Thus, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the word of liberalism began to be cited at the end of the XIXth century, liberalism was defended by its advocaters such as Munif Pasha, Sakizli Ohannes Pasha and Prince Sebahaddin, and was partly practiced Nevertheless all through the XIXth century the Ottoman Empire was under the political economic and financial pressure of the Western powers and it lost its independency to a great extend it became an open market and source of raw materials for the European capital. Moreover, aggravation of foreign debts and capitulations caused financial on Europe and DUYUN-U UMUMIYE (Foreign Debts Administration). Under the light of all these aspects liberalism in the state administration and economic activities could never be provided. In fact, Ottoman liberalists of those days have been criticized unfairly even today.

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#### Notlar

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(2) For reforms and changes in intellectual life at this period see; Ahmet Refik Altınay, *Lale Devri*, Ankara, 1973. Yusuf Akcura, *Osmanlı Devletinin Dâgilma Devri*, Ankara, 1940. Enver Ziya Karal, "Tanzimattan Evvel Garplilasma Hareketleri", *Tanzimat I*, Istanbul, 1940, pp. 13-30. Ercument Kuran, "Osmanlı İmparatorlugunda Yenilesme Hareketleri" *Türk Dunyasi El Kitabı*, Ankara, 1976, pp. 1003-1013. Niyazi Berkes, *Turkiyede Cagdaslasma*, Istanbul, 1973, pp. 41-126

(3) About the reform layihâs presenting to Selim III see; Cevdet Pasa, *Tarih-i Cevdet*, c. VI. Dersaadet, 1309, pp. 3-54. Karal, "Nizam-i Cedide Dair Layihalar", *Tarih Vesikalari*, I, pp. 414-425, II, (1942-1943) pp. 111, 342-351, 24-432. For the comments on this subject also see; Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, V, Ankara, 1983. Shaw, *Osmanlı İmparatorlugu ve Modern Turkiye*, c. 1, (trans. M. Harmancı), Istanbul, 1983. Berkes, *Turkiyede Cagdaslasma*, Ankara, 1987, pp. 87-92. Bahaeddin Yediyildiz, "Batılılaşmanın Temelleri Üzerine Bazı Düşünceler", *Birinci Milli Turkoloji Kongresi (Istanbul, 6-9 subat 1973)* Tebligler, Istanbul, 1980, pp. 327-335.

(4) For this period see also; Stanford Shaw, *Between Old and New, The Ottoman Empire Under Sultan Selim 1789-1807*, Cambridge, 1971.

(5)For Sened-i Ittifak see; Inalcik, "Sened-i Ittifak and Gulhane Hatt-i Humayunu", Belleten, XXVIII/12 (Ank., 1964), pp. 630-662. Rifat Onsoy, "Sened-i Ittifak ve Turk Demokrasi Tarihindeki Yeri", Turkiye'de demokrasi Hareketleri Konferansi 6-8 Kasim 1985 H.U. Edb. Fakultesi Dergisi, c. 4, no: 1 (Ank., 1985)

(6)For Mahmud's reign reforms see;Sertoglu,"Tanzi- mata Dogru",Sultan II.Mahmud ve Reformlari Semineri 28-30 Haziran 1989, Bildiriler, Istanbul, 1990, pp. 1-10. Seyitdanlioglu, "Tanzimatın on hazirliklari ve Meclis-i Vala-yi Ahkam-i Adliye'nin Kurulusu 1838-1840", Sultan II. Mahmud ve reformlari Semineri 28-30 Haziran 1989,Bildiriler ,Istanbul, 1990, pp. 107-112.

(7)Ercument Kuran,"Sultan Mahmud ve Kavalali Mehmed Ali Pasa'nin Karsilikli Tesirleri", Sultan II.Mahmud ve Reformlari Semineri 28-30 Haziran 1989, Bildiriler, Istanbul, 1990, pp. 107-112.

(8)Sertoglu, pp. 1-10. Seyitdanlioglu, pp. 147-156.

(9)Seyitdanlioglu,Tanzimat Doneminde Meclis-i Vala, Ankara, 1994, pp. 19-24.

(10) Ismail Soysal,"Umur-u Hariciye Nezareti'nin Kurulmasi 1836", Sultan II. Mahmud ve Reformlari Semineri 28-30 Haz. 1989 Bildiriler, Istanbul, 1990, pp. 71-80. Carler Findley, "The Foundation of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry Beginnings of Breaucratic Reform Under Selim and Mahmud II", International Journal of Middle East Studies, III/4, (1972), pp. 388-116.

(11)For the text of the Tanzimat Decree see; Gozubuyuk, S.-Kili, Suna, Turk Anayasa Metinleri 1839-1990, Ank., 1982, pp. 1-4. There are several works on Tanzimat period.Some of them are; Karal, Osmanli Tarihi, c. V, Ank., 1983. Kaynar, Resat, Mustafa Resit Pasa ve Tanzimat, Ank. 1985, Maarif Vekaleti, Tanzimat Istanbul, 1940, Mustafa Resit Pasa ve Donemi Semineri Bildiriler Ankara 13-14 Mart 1985, Ankara, 1987. Tarih ve Toplum, c. 12 no: 70 (Tanzimat özel sayisi) (Kasim 1989). Tanzimatın 150. Yildonumu Uluslararası Sempozyumu (Bildiriler), Ankara, 1991. Yuzellinci Yilinda Tanzimat, (H.Dursun Yildiz), Ankara, 1992. Tanzimatın 150. Yildonumu Uluslararası Sempozyumu Ankara 31 Ekim-3 Kasim 1989, Ank., 1989.

(12)Seyitdanlioglu, Tanzimat Devrinde Meclis-i Vala 1838-1868, Ank., 1994, pp. 19-34.

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