

Anglo- Ottoman Relations and William Gladstone, 1868-1880

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The study tries to reassess Anglo-Ottoman relations between 1868 and 1880. The emphasis, however, is on how Ottoman officialdom perceived a British shift from the Crimean system during the 1870's and interpreted Gladstonianism.

When anxiety arose in Constantinople after the return to power the Liberal Party, Musurus Pasha, the Ottoman ambassador in London, reported to his Foreign Ministry, arguing that there was a considerable difference between William Gladstone sitting in opposition as a liberal and Gladstone in power. The Question of the Orient for the British was not a question of party politics but a national question.¹ For Musurus, there was no little cause for alarm and major change under the Liberals was not expected as it was believed a continuation of their predecessors' policies on foreign affairs would be carried out.

After the death of Lord Palmerston in 1865, there was a shift in British politics, as a result of a policy of non-commitment, from being an informal ally of the Ottoman Empire to one more distanced from the affairs of the Ottomans. Furthermore, the Liberals always had the reputation of being very critical on Ottomans' reform projects and their treatment of non-Muslims.

However, liberals anti Turkishness should not be overemphasised, as it has been reflected in the historiography of the period so far. Although they were heavily critical of the Ottoman government's treatment of its Christian subjects and supported their emancipation, they were a strong supporter of the Concert of Europe and believed in the preservation of the Ottoman Empire once the disturbed provinces were liberated.

In studying Ottoman foreign relations of the late 19th century, there is still a major gap and eurocentric approaches dominate historical writing. Therefore, the present study, with the assistance of the Ottoman primary documents as well as some unexplored European sources, reassesses Anglo- Ottoman relations of 1870's and hopes to partially fulfil an existing gap in the historiography of both states.

SECTION I

In British historiography, Gladstone's first premiership, is known as a period of a policy not only of non-intervention in foreign relations but also one of indifference. Britain had developed a reputation of indifference regarding the

¹ BBA (Prime Ministerial Archives- Istanbul), HRSYS (Ottoman Foreign Ministerial Archives, Political Section) 1256/3, Musurus to Sawas, London 11 April 1880.

continent and of having no leaning to any particular powers.² Moreover, the Liberals, with Gladstone in particular, were not sympathetic towards the Ottomans, partly due to the policies of the Conservatives under Palmerston and partly due to the Ottoman maladministration. The Palmerstonians' were strong supporters of the integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire at all costs, which they thought essential to the European balance of power.

On the other hand, Gladstone openly stated that the Palmerston's Crimean system was a mistake and despite the heavy borrowings in the last 20 years by the Ottomans, progress in the promised Ottoman reforms was shortcoming.

Throughout their administration between 1868 and 1874, Gladstone and his Foreign Secretary Lord Granville, despite their differences in personality, enjoyed an intimate relationship.³ When one reads the regular official, and personal, correspondence between the two, Granville showed more sympathy to the Turks and had a good working relationship with the long serving Ottoman Ambassador, Musurus Pasha.⁴

At the same time, Henry Elliott, the British ambassador in Constantinople worked closely with the Ottoman officials. He had a reputation of being pro-Turkish, which he was often criticized for at home and a dislike for the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople, Nicholas P. Ignatief.⁵

When the liberals came to power, the administration of Ottoman affairs was in the hands of a number of experienced statesman rather than Sultan Abdulaziz . Chief amongst these was undoubtedly Aali Pasha, who held the position of Grand Vezier, and with the death of Fuad(1869) , another prominent statesman, the post of Foreign Minister, until 1871.⁶ Musurus Pasha, a Phanariate who served as the Ottoman Ambassador in London for 35 years, also played an important role in Anglo-Ottoman relations, particularly during Gladstone's first spell as Prime Minister.

Aali, an Anglophile, was well aware that the Liberals were not a major ally of the Ottoman Empire and that garnering their support would be difficult.⁷ Yet both he and Musurus, despite the shift in the British policy since Palmerston, continued to rely on the British for support, and in times of crisis generally looked to act in tandem with the British rather than with any of the other European powers.

During the early days of the Liberal government, the Ottomans were busy with the uprising on the island of Crete, where the Christians were demanding unification with the mainland Greece. Most of the assistance no doubt came from

² TNA (The National Archives), FO (Foreign Office documents) 881/2961, Lytton to Granville, Vienna, 27 December 1871.

³ For details see: Ramm. *Gladstone-Granville Correspondence*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 390. In foreign affairs and in relations with British foreign representatives abroad, Gladstone very rarely corresponded directly and always went through the Foreign Office.

⁵ Elliott, *Some Revolutions and Diplomatic Experience*, 180-201.

⁶ See: Inal, *Osmanlı Devrinde Son Sadrazamlar*.

⁷ BBA, HRSYS 579/10, Musurus to Aali, London, 11 November 1869.

mainland Greece. In the international arena, none of the Great Powers wished to instigate a war between Greece and the Ottomans and thus followed a non-interventionist policy. However, reports from the island stated that Russian aid was being given to the insurgents and the Powers were worried Russian intervention could lead to a war between the two neighbouring states.

By the end of 1868, the Ottomans re-established their authority on the island and, with the support of the European powers, a conference was convened in Paris in early 1869 to restore relations between Greece and the Ottomans and settle the remaining issues between the two states. Throughout the crises, the British observed the developments with caution but it did not depart from the policy of the neutrality; nor did it give any support to the insurgents. But at the conference, the British tabled a policy favourable to the Ottomans, in contrast to the Russians and the French, who seemed to pursue policies favourable to the Greek delegation.⁸

The main issue that involved both Britain and the Ottoman Empire under the period of review was no doubt the Russian abrogation of the Black Sea clauses of the Paris Peace Treaty.⁹ Since 1856, the Russian state had been looking for an opportune moment to nullify the Black Sea clauses of the Treaty. It was Russian support of Prussia and its defeat of France during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 that presented the Russians with that opportunity.¹⁰

When rumours on the the revision of the 1856 Treaty started, the Ottomans expressed concern not only at the possible revision of the clauses regarding the neutralisation of the Black Sea but also at the annexation of Bessarabia.¹¹ Thus, after the Russian ambassador, Nicholas Ignatiev spoke with Aali Pasha on the possibility of abrogation by September 1870, the sense of crisis began to be felt in the Ottoman capital.

In the mean time, Musurus discussed the issue with Granville, who stated that Russia was willing to establish a permanent peace, and that the British government wished to see a durable peace which would be acceptable to both parties.¹²

In the middle of these discussions, Prince Gortchakov, having the German support, sent a note to all signatories of the Paris Peace in November 1870 declaring the nullification of the Black Sea clauses of the Treaty.¹³ Although the Russians would have liked to solve the issue bilaterally with the Ottomans, Aali insisted on joint action with the rest of the signatories of the Paris Treaty and appealed to them through their representatives.¹⁴ When Aali approached Elliot, the British Ambassador's view was that the Ottomans and British should act together but that

⁸ Davison, *Nineteenth Century Ottoman Diplomacy and Reforms*, 228-37.

⁹ Jelavich, *The Straits Question*, 25-78. For the full collection of the Ottoman Foreign Ministerial documents, Kuneralp, *London Conference*.

¹⁰ BBA, HRSYS 884/ 5, Aali to Musurus, Constantinople, 2 October 1870.

¹¹ BBA, HRSYS 884/5, Caratheodory to Aali, Petersbourg, 13 September 1870.

¹² BBA, HRSYS 884/ 5, Musurus to Aali, London, 8 October 1870.

¹³ For some interesting correspondence of Gorchakov, BBA, HRSYS 885/1, Gorchakov to de Staal, Tzarskoe-Selo, 19&20 October 1870.

¹⁴ The circular of Gorchakov, London, 23 November 1870.

the Turks should not expect any material assistance. Furthermore, on the rumours about the possibility of a war between the Russians and the Ottomans, Elliott stated that in the case of war Great Britain would maintain a neutral attitude, and that finances or supplying arms would not be possible.¹⁵

About the Russian demands, the Ottomans were more concerned at a loosening of the security lines of the Empire, where the British and the rest of the powers were not necessarily against the denunciation of the Black Sea clauses of the Paris Treaty and only opposed on the Russian unilateral action when it was without their consent.¹⁶ Furthermore, while the powers supported the principle of a conference, Aali Pasha was worried that the question of the Christians and other remaining issues of the Paris Treaty would be brought up in the conference as well.

It was the British ambassador again who tried to convince Aali not to worry because if there were going to be a Conference it would only deal with the questions of the neutralization of the Black Sea and related issues.¹⁷

The British stance had always been important for the Ottomans not only because the latter needed the formers' support but also because Aali, as well as Musurus, knew that the British attitude would be the decisive factor at the Conference.¹⁸

The British government supported a jointed action by the powers to ease the crises and when the German Chancellor Bismarck suggested hosting the Conference in London, the British did not show much of an objection. The Ottomans were represented by Musurus in London, alongside the ambassadors of the rest of the powers. With the protocol signed on 15 March 1871, Russia gained back the rights to the Black Sea that it had lost in 1856.

During the Conference, it was the regular correspondence between Aali and Musurus, as well as their diplomatic skills, that gave the Ottomans a significant role in the bargaining process and secured control of the Straits for the Ottomans.¹⁹

Though Gladstone would have liked to see only partial restoration of the Sultan's authority over the Straits, at the end he relinquished the idea to avoid possible tension with his Foreign Secretary, who did not fully support him on this issue.²⁰ Furthermore, Granville's intervention meant that the powers accepted the condition of no treaty being changed without the consent of the rest of the powers.

The London Conference was significant for Ottoman foreign relations as it was the last time the British cooperated with the Ottomans and safeguarded the

¹⁵ TNA, FO 881/1817, Elliot to Granville, Therapia, October 17, 1870.

¹⁶ Ramm, *Gladstone-Granville Correspondence*, 168-9.

¹⁷ TNA, FO 78/2156, Musurus to Elliot, draft by Elliot, Constantinople, November 1870.

¹⁸ TNA, FO 78/2171, FO, 3 January 1871, Draft by Elliot.

¹⁹ Kuneralp, *London Conference*, 16.

²⁰ BBA, HRSYS 885/1, Musurus to Aali, London, 13 November 1870.

latters' interests and that the Ottomans played an active role at the Conference table.²¹

The Liberals had always been critical on the Ottoman treatment of its Christian subjects. From the early 1870's onwards, British consular reports noted that the situation in Bosnia and also Herzegovina was deteriorating sharply and the Ottoman administration was favouring the Muslims against the Christians. In the Epirus, the case was seen as even more alarming as the majority of the Muslims were of Albanian origin and thus more difficult to deal with.²²

Gladstone was particularly concerned about the future of the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. He stated that the only way to liberate the Romanians of the Russian influence was for it to be granted internal freedom. For Gladstone, the repressive measures the Turks were implementing not only constituted a major offence but also served Russian designs.²³ On the other hand, Aali Pasha through his correspondence with Musurus or through his conversations with the British Ambassador Elliot, stated that the powers were underestimating Ottoman efforts and that far greater progress was to be observed than had been anticipated.

In general, although Gladstone and the rest of the Liberals were not pleased with the progress of the reforms or with the conditions of the Christians and strongly opposed the Crimean system, they persisted in a policy of non-commitment during the first period of the Liberal government.²⁴ The Liberals were more concerned with the domestic politics and the continental matters, such as France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1 and the Three Emperors League between Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary of 1873.

However, it would be erroneous to this seemingly unfriendly attitude. When one reads the conversations between Musurus and Granville, Granville was certainly genial and cooperative in his dealings with the Turkish Ambassador. The Foreign Secretary always stated that Britain desired to see the implementation of the reform projects by the Ottoman Government, especially on the issue of the Christians, and welcomed the continuation of mutual efforts of both governments on the field of railways construction and the reorganization on the military forces and the navy which had not been disrupted under the Liberal administration.²⁵

Despite the efforts of the Ottomans to keep a cordial relations with the British liberals, they knew that the latter was not only disinterested but also dissatisfied with the progress in the Empire. Therefore, when the conservatives under Benjamin

²¹ For the full collection of the British confidential correspondence, see: TNA, FO 881/1817, *Turkey, Correspondence respecting the Views of Her Majesty's Government regarding the Revision of the Treaty of Paris of 1856, and as to the Assistance to be rendered by Great Britain to Turkey in the event of an attack from Russia.*

²² TNA, FO 881/375, Holmes to Granville, „Bosna Serai, 27 April 1871.

²³ Ram, *Gladstone-Granville Correspondence*, 242.

²⁴ Another important issue was the question of Ottoman debt. The Liberals were also concerned not only about the slow progress of the reforms but also on the Ottoman repayment and the policy that had to be taken towards the finances and future of the bondholders. TNA, FO 881/2544, Granville to Elliot, FO, 3 October 1874.

²⁵ BBA, HRSYS 579/24, Musurus to Safvet, London, 3 April 1874.

Disraeli(Lord Beaconsfield) came to power in February 1874, the Ottomans hoped to be able to return to traditional policy.²⁶

SECTION II

The return of the conservatives ended the period of non-intervention and isolation; Benjamin Disraeli, was the last British statesman to support the Palmerstonian system and the integrity of the Ottoman Empire which he believed essential for the European Balance of Power. But from the outset of his term, divergent voices were being heard amongst the conservatives and the Prime Minister's old age was to limit his influence in Parliament.²⁷

The Ottomans were pleased once the new cabinet was formed on 26 February 1874 as they viewed it as a sign of a return to their traditional policy.²⁸ Musurus, furthermore, expressed approval of the appointment of Lord Derby to the Foreign Office. Derby had always expressed sympathies for the Ottoman Empire; the Turkish Ambassador recalled Derby's firmness and Great Britain's neutrality during the Cretan crisis, during which the French and the Russians were in favour of the island's accession with Greece.²⁹ But, Musurus could not foresee the Derby's replacement with Lord Salisbury, the latter known to have an unfavourable opinion of the state of Turkey.

During the mid 1870's, power struggles among the central administration and serious crises of authority in Constantinople emerged, which, through military coups, led to the deposition of two Sultans, Sultan Abdulaziz and Sultan Murat , and ended with the accession of Sultan Abdulhamid II to the throne in August 1876. The accession of Abdulhamid on the one hand and the death of prominent Tanzimat statesmen such as Fuad and Aali Pashas on the other led to a new phase in Ottoman politics, in which authority was concentrated in the person of the Sultan, in contrast to the Tanzimat era. Thus, although the new Sultan was occupied during the initial stages of his reign with the strengthening of his domestic authority and with the eastern crises, Abdulhamid still considered Britain his closest ally and relied on its support throughout the crises.³⁰

For the Disraeli government, on the other hand, more than the power struggles in Constantinople, Anglo-Ottoman relations evolved around three major issues. The primary issue was the Eastern Crisis and the Bulgarian Uprising. The second was the irregular behaviour of the Circassians who had been settled into the European provinces after the Crimean War. The last outstanding issue was Ottoman finances, foreign debt and the funding of reforms.³¹

²⁶ BBA, HRSYS 579/36, Musurus to Rachid, London, 26 February 1874.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18 March 1874.

²⁸ BBA, HRSYS 579/26, Musurus to Rachid, 26 February 1874.

²⁹ TNA, FO 78/2363, Rachid to Musurus, Constantinople, 18 March 1874.

³⁰ Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*, 1-52; Hanioglu, *Late Ottoman Empire*, 109-50.

³¹ BBA, HRSYS 579/49, Musurus to Safvet, London, 19 July 1875.

Ottoman foreign debt and Ottoman reforms were the main concerns of the British government during the early years of the Disraeli government. The Conservatives, in contrast to the Liberals, who sought more radical solutions, were ready to extend the Ottoman debt.³² But, all the members of the Parliament, both liberal and conservative, voiced their desire for an efficient administration and for prosperity in Turkey and their subsequent displeasure at the fact that the Ottoman administration was not following a suitable policy regarding reforms and the financing of the exterior debt. However, with the emergence of the Eastern Crisis, the remaining issues were cleared off the agenda and the Crisis became the core concern of the European states.

The Eastern Crisis of 1875-78, which started as local revolts in the Balkan provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, led to the Bulgarian Uprising and the involvement of local states, namely Serbia and Montenegro. Moreover, the Bulgarian Uprising of 1876 and the brutal methods used by the Ottomans in the suppression of the uprising did not escape public awareness in Europe and fostered virulent anti-Turkish sentiment.³³ On the question of the Bulgarian Uprising and the treatment of the Bulgarians by the Turks, there was a major division in the British Parliament. The group led by Benjamin Disraeli insisted that the charges against the Turks were not proven yet where Gladstone and his followers stated the prevailing government had higher interests in the matter and was therefore keeping quiet. The opposition accused Disraeli for being pro-Turkish and also encouraged strong public opinion to put pressure on the government to abstain from giving support to the Turks and to grant self-government in the disturbed provinces.³⁴

In the mean time, the deadlock in finding a solution in the crises among the Great Powers and the upheavals among the European public due to the Turkish atrocities against the Bulgarians increased the threat of war between the Russians and the Ottomans.³⁵

While the mediation between the Great Powers to find a solution to the crises continued, Henry Elliott, the British ambassador in Constantinople, proved himself ineffective.³⁶ His pro-Turkish views during the Bulgarian Crisis had already made him unpopular in England but the defining moment came during the Constantinople Conference at the end of 1876. His dislike for the Russian Ambassador Ignatiev was already known but during the Conference, Elliott had a difference of opinion with Lord Salisbury, the chief British Plenipotentiary at the Conference.³⁷ Both of them found it difficult to work together and Elliott heavily criticized Salisbury for his

³² BBA, HRSYS 579/49, Musurus to Safvet, London, 24 June 1875

³³ *Yasamee*, Ottoman Diplomacy, 7-10.

³⁴ BBA, HRSYS 579/49, Musurus to Safvet, 18 July 1875.

³⁵ For an interesting interpretation by Musurus on the discussion of the eastern crisis in the British Parliament see: BBA, HRSYS 579/55, Musurus to Rachid, London, 10 February 1876.

³⁶ Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question*.

³⁷ Elliot, *Some Revolutions and Diplomatic Experience*, 195-201; Aydin, "Osmanlı-İngiliz İlişkilerinde İstanbul Konferansının Yeri", *Tarih araştırmaları*, 101-115.

cooperation with the Russian ambassador, Ignatief. Under the circumstances, Derby decided to replace him with Henry Layard who also had a reputation as being Turcophile but was also believed to have a greater international standing.³⁸

More than the Foreign Secretary, it was Disraeli who had a close relation with Henry Layard and his family, which caused the change in the British Embassy in Constantinople. Henry Layard, who had been in charge of affairs at the Madrid Embassy since 1869, replaced Elliot and Elliot was posted to Vienna.³⁹ This caused some discontent among the Liberals, and Mr Gladstone and others in the Liberal Party who were against Layard's posting stated that it would bring about 'another Crimean War'. They viewed Layard, who came from a liberal background, with some suspicion as a result of his abandoning his political principles by serving under a Conservative government.⁴⁰ Layard, on the other hand, had a strong personal dislike for Gladstone and blamed him for the negative public opinion of the Turks and the coming of the war..

The rumours among the conservative circles, regarding Layard's appointment was that it was to prevent a future war between Turkey and Russia. Soon after he arrived to the Ottoman capital, he adopted a role of moderator between the London cabinet and the Sultan and the Porte, convincing the Sultan of the need for further reforms in the disturbed provinces and of British neutrality in the case of war. No doubt he had a more striking personality than his predecessor and soon established a reputation as a doyen among foreign envoys.

The new Ambassador, who had a dislike for Ignatief, was known for being anti-Russian and opposed to Bulgarian self-government, believing it would, under Russian influence, merge with Serbia.⁴¹ Throughout his stay he tried to sway the Sultan on the topic of Russian ambitions and maintained anti-Russian sentiments. It can be argued that Layard's Embassy had a profound influence on the Ottoman administration and that he personally contributed to the chain of events during the early Hamidian period.

Shortly after Layard's arrival at Constantinople, correspondence from Gladstone to the new Ambassador stated that the former Prime Minister, in lieu of the fact that the Sultan's reforms could not bring any improvements to the existing circumstances, wished to see the disturbed provinces liberated. Furthermore, Gladstone also stated that the remaining provinces would be under Ottoman domains and that their territorial integrity would need to be secured. However, the British ambassador did not welcome this correspondence and replied that the issue was being exaggerated in Britain and that the Muslims were suffering just as much. However, although Layard stated there was no doubt regarding the veracity of the

³⁸ For the Constantinople Conference, *Ibid.*, Layard, *Memoirs*, Add. 38934, Section I.

³⁹ Austrian Foreign Minister Count Andrassy was not very pleased by the Elliot's posting but did not raise his voice to stir things up.

⁴⁰ Layard, *Memoirs*, Add. 38,934, Section I.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

reported of acts of brutality committed by Turkish troops and irregulars, he also stated that the Turkish authorities were in no position to prevent them and that the numbers of acts had been inflated.⁴²

When war broke out between Ottoman Empire and Russia in April 1877, Disraeli and Layard strongly believed that it was the outrages of Gladstone that had played an indirect role on pushing the Russians to declaring war.⁴³ Conversely, Gladstone and the Liberals kept the public informed throughout the war of Ottoman cruelties against the Bulgarians.⁴⁴ However, Gladstone never supported the idea of a Greater Bulgaria and saw the problem as a result of Ottoman misgovernment and never as a Muslim-Christian antagonism.⁴⁵

During the war, the Sultan, through his Ambassador in London tried to approach the British to mediate an end to the war several times but the British needed the assent of the other powers and divisions within the Disraeli's Cabinet were preventing his government from taking a lead on the issue. The Ottomans also asked the British for financial assistance, which was rejected by the Conservatives. Throughout the war, the British kept their neutrality and stated that assistance would be forthcoming.

However, the Adrianople armistice ending the war on 31 January 1878 prompted the British to take a more active role. The preliminary peace of San Stefano in March and the replacement of Lord Derby with Lord Salisbury in early April were the catalysts that changed the course of developments related to the Russo-Turkish war.⁴⁶

Soon after the appointment, Salisbury's involvement in foreign affairs became prominent and pro-active. The new Foreign Secretary believed that the Crimean system was long since obsolete and that the Ottomans were in need of protection.⁴⁷ Furthermore, there was no way the new Foreign Secretary was going to allow the ratification of San Stefano, which not only established Slav dominance in the Balkans but, more critically, increased Russian influence in the eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire, thus endangering British interests in the east.⁴⁸

It was through skilled diplomatic manoeuvring that Salisbury succeeded in signing secret agreements with the Russians, Turks and Austrians prior to the Congress of Berlin and it was thus the British who dominated the outcome of the Congress more than any other power.

⁴² Layard, *Memoirs*, Add.38,994, Section I.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question*, 203-13; Millman, *Great Britain and Eastern Question*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ For Lord Salisbury's Eastern policy immediate after the Treaty of San Stefano, see: BBA, HRSYS 1218/5, *La Circular de Salisbury*, London, 1 April 1878.

⁴⁷ Layard, *Memoirs*, Section 14.

⁴⁸ BBA, HRSYS 1218/5, *La Circular*.

Thus, most importantly, the British via the Anglo-Ottoman convention of 4 June, succeeded in occupying the island of Cyprus.⁴⁹ Through the convention, the Ottomans promised the British to implement the reforms for the Armenians in the eastern provinces of the Empire, in which the Russians had been hoping to use as a buffer zone as per the San Stefano accords of March.

It goes without saying that Layards' influence on the Sultan and on members of the Ottoman government coupled with Salisbury's skills paved the way for British occupation of the island on eve of the Congress.

Most of the sessions of the Congress of Berlin, between 13 June and 13 July, dealt with the drawing of a new Balkan map and the Christian reforms. Issues, which were possible sources of conflict between the Powers, such as border disputes or Ottoman finances, were momentarily disregarded and left for future arrangements. Ottoman plenipotentiaries, despite their efforts, felt somewhat isolated due to their weakness at the negotiating table. However, with the treaty signed at the end of the Congress, a peace, which was to last until the Balkan wars of 1912-3 was secured.⁵⁰

At the end of the Congress, the Liberals and Gladstone were pleased that many Christians were emancipated from Turkey and that peaceful solution had been reached in Berlin but they criticized the Conservatives heavily over the Cyprus Convention. Although the Conservatives insisted that the convention was not forced upon the Sultan, the available data suggests that it was a *fait accompli* and that the Sultan wished to have it reversed soon after.⁵¹ However, after the Treaty an understanding between the liberals and conservatives over the affairs of the Ottoman Empire took place and it seemed that with the dominance of Salisbury's views in British foreign affairs major differences were overcome.

On the other hand, the Eastern Crisis and the Berlin Treaty destroyed the Ottoman prestige, both at home and abroad, discredited the Tanzimat policy and ended the already crumbling Crimean system and any last vestiges of the informal Ottoman-British alliance.⁵²

With Salisbury intent upon curbing Russian power in the east, the last two years of the conservative rule saw the implementation of the Berlin Treaty. Although Layard and Salisbury remained cautious of each other, with the Foreign Secretary wary of his Ambassador, they developed a working relationship and took leading roles over the issues of rectification of the Greek frontier, the Montenegrin border and reforms in the eastern provinces.⁵³

⁴⁹ See: Uçarol, *Kıbrıs Sorunu ve Osmanlı-İngiliz Anlaşması*; Kurat, *Henry Layard'ın İstanbul Büyükelçiliği*,

⁵⁰ See: Medlicott, *The Congress of Berlin and After 1878-80*; Millman, *Great Britain and Eastern Question*, Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha, *Mirat-i Hakikat*; Türkgeldi, *Mesail-i Mühimme-ı Siyasiye*; Davison, "The Ottoman Empire and the Congress of Berlin", 205-23.

⁵¹ BBA, YEE (Yıldız Collection) 76/9, Safvet to Layard, Constantinople, 21 July 1878.

⁵² Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy*, 13-15.

⁵³ BBA, YPRK ESA ((Yıldız Collection, Consular Section) 2/44, Layard to Granville, May 1880.

The Sultan, on the other hand, had some reservations regarding Layard after the Cyprus Convention and the Congress, but the latter still continued to influence the Sultan and the two met on a regular basis, to the extent that they shared some personal occasions which no other Ambassador experienced at the time with the Sultan.

When the Conservatives were defeated and Benjamin Disraeli had little option but to resign in the April 1880 elections, the Sultan and the rest of the Ottoman officials in Constantinople were very much alarmed.

Soon after Henry Layard, whom the Sultan still considered a personal friend and with whom many Ottoman officials and foreign envoys enjoyed a good working relationship, was recalled and replaced by Edward Goschen.⁵⁴

In the existing historiography, Layard is mostly seen as pro-Turkish and as safeguarding Ottoman interests. However, one should read these assumptions with caution as more than anything Layard was very anti-Russian and believed that the falling of the Ottoman Empire into Russian domination or the division of the Empire between Russia and Austria was to be prevented. He was highly critical of the Ottoman administration and had little hope for the progress of the reforms or with the Sultan personally. During his travels, during his last two years in particular, he noticed the lack of progress with the reforms and saw that the country was in a state of despair. He agreed with Salisbury that an Ottoman collapse could only be prevented using the protection of a third party.

SECTION III

Early in April 1880 the result of the general elections in England and the resignation of Lord Beaconsfield's ministry became known in Constantinople.⁵⁵ The Sultan was convinced that with Mr Gladstone and the Liberals, English policy with regard to Turkey would undergo a complete and radical change. The Christians in the Ottoman Empire, who had little fondness for Lord Beaconsfield and always considered Gladstone their protector against the Turks, were jubilant with the return of the liberals to power.⁵⁶

Musurus Pasha tried to convince the Sultan that a change of government did not mean a change of policy with regards to Turkey and that he had little to fear from Gladstone and his Liberal Party. Musurus, despite being cautious, had enjoyed a working relationship with the Liberals and endeavoured to explain to the Sultan that they only wanted to see the implementation of the Berlin Treaty.⁵⁷

Furthermore, in response to the rumours that the new government had no interest in the Ottoman Empire or in its existence, the Ottoman ambassador in

⁵⁴ Layard, *Memoires*, Section 14 and 15, 74-180.

⁵⁵ BBA, HRSYS 579/75, Musurus to Sawas, London, 11 April 1880. According to April 1880 elections, at the Commons 228 conservatives and 345 liberals.

⁵⁶ BBA, HRSYS 579/75, Musurus to Sawas, London, 13 April, 1880.

⁵⁷ BBA, YPRK, ESA (Yıldız Collection, Consular Section) 2/18, Musurus to the Ottoman Charge d'Affaires in London, Constantinople, 28 May 1880.

London as well as Ottoman Foreign Minister recalled the traditional friendship between the two states. The presence of a figure such as Granville was a plus for the British government and Gladstone showed his willingness to cooperate by appointing Granville as his Foreign Secretary. For the Ottoman Minister, the rumours were to be disregarded as irrelevancies.⁵⁸

When Musurus saw Granville soon after the election, the Ottoman ambassador tried to convince him that his government was attempting to execute the Berlin Treaty properly. In return, Granville went on to state that they supported the continuation of the Empire with no further territorial losses and saw Berlin Treaty as a definitive agreement. Thus, the remaining articles of the Treaty, such as those dealing with the Greek and Montenegrin borders and with the Armenian reforms, which the new government claimed to have a priority, were to be implemented without delay.⁵⁹

Upon appointment to office, Gladstone, stated that the preservation of the European Concert was vital to European peace and security. For Gladstone, the European balance of power, the core policy of Conservatives, was an evil. He therefore stated that cooperation rather than conflict should be the main planks of his new foreign policy. He insisted, as his Foreign Secretary, on the implementation of the Berlin Treaty and saw the treaty as conclusive.⁶⁰ After his conversation with Gladstone, the Turkish ambassador wrote to his Foreign Ministry saying that Gladstone was not looking for drastic changes and would more or less continue with the policy of the previous government, following in Salisbury's footsteps.⁶¹

An interesting development was Henry Layard, before he left office, wrote a long letter, in confidence, to Granville, explaining the situation and imparting some advice regarding the situation in the East. Upon reading his memoirs, one notices that the tenets of this advice-cum-instructions was adopted by the new government.⁶²

The ex- Ambassador stated despite the Berlin Treaty, there was still no security in the Balkans. The Bulgarians were using these circumstances to their advantage and were hoping for further intervention by the powers. He went on to write that Article 23 of the Berlin Treaty, which dealt with the reforms in the Macedonian provinces, had to be implemented without any further delays.

Layard also wrote that, although certain privileges had been gained by the British in the eastern provinces, the situation in the region had deteriorated in the ensuing two years.

Furthermore, there were two issues that the new government had to study carefully and which needed to be solved without delay. The most important was the question of Eastern Rumelia. This has also to do due to the sensitivity of the situation

⁵⁸ TNA, FO 78/3165, Assim to Musurus, Constantinople, 2 May 1880.

⁵⁹ BBA, HRSYS 1256/3, Sawas to Musurus, Constantinople, 17 May 1880.

⁶⁰ Schroeder, *Systems Stability and Statecraft*, 97-121.

⁶¹ BBA, YPRK. HR(Yildiz Collection, Foreign Ministerial Section) 5 /20, Musurus to Sawas, May 1880.

⁶² Layard, *Memoirs*, Add. 34,998, Section 22

in the province and the danger of the province being invaded by the Ottomans. The second issue was that of the Greek border. Both issues had been left to future arrangements but little progress had been made.

However, Layard stated that the situation in the Ottoman Empire had deteriorated since 1878. Although the Sultan was willing to take steps for reform, when it came to implementation, no concrete steps had been taken.⁶³

No doubt, there was also a shift in the policy objectives of the Liberals. Firstly, in contrast to the first term, Gladstone placed much greater emphasis on foreign policy during his second term in office. Secondly, both Granville and Gladstone believed the remaining issues of the Berlin Treaty, were to be settled with no delays. Both statesmen believed that they would pressurise the Sultan, in concert with rest of the powers, into implement the remaining issues of the Berlin Treaty. The Liberals were aware that the Empire became so centralized under Sultan Abdulhamid that an immediate change was necessary to save the Empire from ominous circumstances.⁶⁴ Thirdly, they believed that there was no reason not to follow where Salisbury left on the affairs of the east.

Under the circumstances, on his way to taking up his post in Constantinople, Granville instructed his new ambassador Goschen that three major issues marked the government's priorities. The first was the Greek frontier question and improved administration in the border districts of Thessaly and Epirus. Granville, like Salisbury, stated that an International Commission should be formed to resolve the boundary question with Greece. If the Ottomans were to find the Commission's presence in a resolution of the issue problematic, the British government would suggest convening conference to meet in Berlin or Paris. The second important issue, which was also very high on Gladstone's agenda, was the Montenegrin issue, which, if not dealt with immediately, the existing animosities between Montenegrin and Albanian would be irreversible. Although there had been a recent decision on the Montenegrin border, the new government stated that further energies needed to be directed to resolving this issue.

The last issue, article 61 of Berlin Treaty, dealt with improvement of conditions for the Armenians in the eastern provinces. On this latter issue, Salisbury's efforts led to some steps being taken, such as the introduction of a number of foreign officers in the Gendarmerie; to establishment of a new system of tax collection and improvements to the judicial system. But, little has been done in the actual execution of these projects.

Finances were another important question on which Granville gave instructions to Goschen. According to Protocol 18 of the Treaty of Berlin, the powers could appoint a Financial Commission if recommended by the Congress. It was not

⁶³ BBA, YPRK, ESA 2/44, Layard to Granville, May 1880.

⁶⁴ TNA, FO 881/4227, Granville to Goschen, FO, 18 May 1880.

only the protection and the payment of the bondholders but also the general situation of the Empire which no doubt played a role in the stagnation of the reforms.

For Granville, it was in the interest of Turkey to settle the remaining questions of Berlin Treaty as soon as possible, and the only hope for the maintenance of the Empire was implement reforms in its administration, both in the capital and also in the provinces.⁶⁵ But for Gladstone and the rest of the Liberals, it was also important that these steps be taken in an amicable manner and in accord with the rest of the powers.

This was more or less the situation when Edward Goschen took over the British Embassy in Constantinople on May 1880.

In conclusion, with the death of Lord Palmerston, a shift did occur in British policy towards the Ottoman Empire, not only under the Liberals but also under the Conservatives. With the exception of old school Palmerstonians like Disraeli, both parties believed that the Crimean system had already become obsolete.

For the Gladstonians, Disraeli, the last Palmerstonian, was always ready for a compromise on the Ottoman Empire when it served British interests. However, with the dominance of Lord Salisbury, who was no friend of the Ottomans, differences in the foreign affairs between the Liberals and the Conservatives started to fade away.

When Gladstone returned to power, he abandoned the policy of non-commitment and adopted a more active role in foreign affairs, in contrast to his first premiership, and on the Eastern Question more or less adopted the foreign policy objectives of Salisbury. Furthermore, the Liberals under Gladstone insisted that concerted efforts of the European powers was essential as balance of power policies brought only conflict.

In 1880, Britain was still Constantinople's closest ally to, despite the deterioration of relations between the Empire and Britain after the Congress of Berlin.⁶⁶

However, this traditional friendship with Britain was soon to end for Abdulhamid, who was convinced that the core issue in the east was the rivalry between Russia and Britain over Central Asia and that Ottoman affairs would take on secondary importance. However, the Sultan also knew that both powers, namely Britain and Russia, were, to a degree, dependent on Germany. Thus, it was imperative for the Ottomans to cultivate German support wherever possible. It was under these circumstances, with the growth of German power on the one hand and waning British friendship on the other, that a new phase began to emerge in Ottoman foreign relations in the 1880's.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ TNA, FO 78/3166, Assim to Musurus, Constantinople, 4 October 1880.

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