

**OTTOMAN POLICY TOWARDS CHRISTIANS DURING
TANZIMAT:
NEW TENDENCES**

1. Genesis of Tanzimat and emergence of concept of equal rights

In the period of military and political dominance of the rulers of Ottoman Empire, the problem of preserving the entirety of the poly-ethnic and poly-confessional state was solved from the standpoint of brutal military force. As it was frequently said by Turkish rulers at that time, "a state obtained by sword, can only be preserved by sword". Islam was an important factor in preserving the "spiritual union" and entirety of the Empire. The forceful islamization of non-Muslim nations was considered by Turkish authorities to be one of the important peaceful means of consolidating their rule on the conquered territories. Another means of preserving the Ottoman domination over non-Muslim countries was the so-called system of *millets*, religious communities, enjoying a certain internal autonomy. It allowed the conquerors to perform their rule through the spiritual leaders of the community without accounting for the internal life of the millets, and benefit in the form of different taxes.

These methods of preserving the Ottoman domination were discredited in the first half of XIX c. The disintegration of the system of military feudal estates (*timars*) resulted in the lessening of the power of the Ottoman army, which came to be defeated not only in the conflicts with the European armies, but also proved unable to cope effectively with the armed revolts inside the state. The liberation of Greece and Serbia after a period of consistent struggle testifies to this state of affairs. The economic advance and the uplift of national self-consciousness among the Christian peoples, as well as the pressure exerted by Europe made the practice of mass Islamization impossible. Islam lost its significance as an integrating force in the ethnically and confessionally heterogeneous Ottoman society. The processes of national consolidation among Slavs, Greeks, and Armenians also reflected on the system of millets. They underwent a gradual transformation to a form in which they prompted the awakening of social consciousness and animation in the social life of the Christian nations.

At the end of XVIII c., some representatives of the Ottoman bureaucratic elite began to realize the necessity of regulating governmental relations with the Christian reaya based on satisfying the minimum of its demands, to avoid subsequent revolts. This idea was first aired in the *lâiha* (Report) of Rumelia's Kadıasker Tatarcık Abdulla Effendi, which he presented to Sultan Selim III in 1791. In his *lâiha*, Tatarcık Abdulla Effendi went beyond the sphere of purely military reforms and depicting the plight of the country, treated the state of the Christians as well¹. In a few years time, in the period when political power was

held by the rebellious circle of the "Rusçuk friends", headed by the famous Mustafa Paşa Alemdar, a government decree was passed, which deserves special attention. The "Vestnik Evropy", published in Petersburg announced, "Mustafa Alemdar has ordered that Muslims should stop using the word *gâvur* (infidel), as any Christian, of any confession serves the same God that Muslims believe in"². This decree did not formally contradict the Koran³. Nevertheless, its publishing during the domination of Muslim fanaticism and the ideas of Muslim supremacy was undoubtedly an event of considerable importance, as it provided the guidelines for a prospective equality of Christians and Muslims. The upsurge in the national-liberation movements of the Balkan peoples from the 20ies of XIX c. was of decisive importance for the maturing of the new approach to the problem of preserving the entirety of the Empire and the policy pursued by the most realistic Turkish rulers. The view came to be held that certain minimal concessions should be granted to Christian peoples, to prevent prospective revolts.

As early as 1827, in a special *ferman* the Porte addressed to the local administration in Rumelia, it was set the task of providing the Christians' security and the inviolability of their property⁴. This idea was further substantiated in the *lâiha*, drafted in 1828 by the well-known poet and government member Keçecizade İzzet Molla, who occupied the post of custodian of the towns of Mecca and Medina, and by the clerk from the *Defterdar* office (the Ministry of Finance) Vecih Effendi. The *lâiha*, presented to Sultan Mahmud II aimed at demonstrating that certain concessions should be granted to the insurgent Christians. Pointing out that the state could not afford to be at war with Russia, the authors employ the following arguments against those rulers that firmly refused any concessions whatsoever, to be granted to the Christians: "Isn't it better for us to try and preserve even a part of what we might completely lose at war"⁵. In a year's time (in 1829), Mahmud II, desperately trying to keep Greece within the limits of the Ottoman Empire, was forced to resort to considerable, from his point of view, concessions. In a *ferman* from the end of muharrem 1245 (July, 1829), while addressing the Greeks of Morea, he promised: "There will be in the future no distinctions made between Muslims and reaya and everybody will be ensured the inviolability of his property, life and honor by a sacred law (*Sharia*) and my sublime patronage"⁶. The *ferman* proved to be a useless sheet of paper. In the future, however, the ideas it launched about the non-discriminating attitude of the Sultan to all his subjects "no matter what their confession was" became one of the guiding lines of Turkish functionaries from the 30-70ies of XIX c. They alluded to them while trying to lessen the pressure exerted by national-liberation movements of the Christian peoples and prevent the countries from interfering with the internal affairs of the Porte, under the pretext of patronizing the "co-religionists". They cited the *Sharia*, as Mahmud did this.

During the first years after the *ferman* for appeasing Morea was published, Sultan Mahmud did not re-consider his attitude to his non-Muslim subjects. He was forcefully "reminded" about it after the considerable Bulgarian revolt from

1835. In the course of his tour round Bulgaria in April 1837, he delivered a speech before the leaders of the Christian communities, stating "It is our wish to ensure the peace and security of all inhabitants of our God-protected great state, both Muslim and reaya. In spite of all difficulties we are determined to secure the flourishing of the state and the population under our protection (i. e. Muslims and reaya) you (i. e. the leaders of Christian communities) bearing in mind our wish, ought to believe us in this deed"⁷. Thus, promising, "To take care" of the welfare of the reaya, the Sultan required its obedience. In the same year, Mahmud II made his famous statement that all his subjects were his children and he treated them equally, the only difference perceived among them being of purely religious nature⁸.

During the rule of the reformer-Sultan, some measures were taken for the gradual elimination of the differences in Muslim and non-Muslim attire: the latter were allowed to wear clothes made of the same material as those of Muslims⁹. Sultan Mahmud, trying to eliminate at least visual differences between Muslims and Non-Muslims introduced *fez* as a common hat for the representatives of both communities¹⁰.

The formation of main ideas of concept of merger began at the end of the 30ies of XIX c., and in many ways it should be connected with the name of Mustafa Reşit Paşa — the initiator of the Tanzimat reforms and the leader of the reform movement in its first stage (end of 30ies — beginning of 50ies of XIX c.). He shared the view that only if a series of reforms on the European model were carried out, could the entirety of the state not only be pre-served, but the former might of the Empire could be restored. The reforms were meant to affect the Christian nations, too. In particular, Reşit suggested that the guarantees on the life, property, and honor should also include non-Muslims. The idea was put forward in the draft project prepared under his guidance, by several administrators¹¹. On the same principle was based the *Gülhane hatt-i şerif* from November 3, 1839, written by Reşit, and initiating the period of Tanzimat. In fact, this principle did not go beyond the idea Sultan Mahmud II aired on the "equal attitude" to all subjects, both Muslims, and Christians.

Besides this, Reşit Paşa put forward the idea of the "unity of the entire Sultan's subjects", irrespective of their confession, which was entirely new for that time. It was at the heart of the newly coined word *tebaa* - "subjects"¹² first used in the draft project of the reform, drawn by a group of ministers headed by Reşit, and later presented to the Sultan. It mentions the "subjects of the Sublime State" (*tebaa-ı Deviet-i Aliyye*), i. e. the Ottoman Empire. The author then makes explicit the scope of the term: "All Muslims and representatives of other millets"¹³. The term was also used in the *Gülhane hatt* and later widely used¹⁴. Some years later, in 1846, addressing the leaders of Christian communities, Reşit endeavored to motivate it theoretically. He stated, "The difference in religion and sect is the personal affair of each individual and should not reflect on his rights . . . We are all subjects of one and the same government and were born and live in one and the same country. This should always be born in mind and no bad feelings should exist

on these grounds . . .¹⁵ This was the first instance of propounding the principles of "common territory" and "common government" as a basis of the unity of all nations in the multinational Ottoman Empire. He was also the first to use the word vatan, or "fatherland" with respect to the Ottoman Empire¹⁶. These ideas were further widely used by the second generation of supporters of Tanzimat and in the same time - apologists of policy of merger.

As a politician Reşit considered the different level councils (*meclis*) established to be of great importance. Christians were also supposed to participate in the councils; the majority, however, was meant to be Muslim¹⁷. The councils were the new means of securing the obedience of the subjected peoples. As early as 1833, the secretary of the British Embassy in Turkey D. Urquart concluded that Sultan could attract the Greeks and other "reaya" by establishing "elementary municipal institutes"¹⁸. Reşit may be supposed to have accepted his idea about employing the councils for securing the "unity" of Muslims and Christians¹⁹. It should be noted that during Reşit's rule a trend existed among Ottoman reform-oriented leaders to involve in the meclis representatives of those strata of non-Muslim nations that were interested in preserving the entirety of the Empire, though dreaming of reforms to guarantee them the inviolability of their life and property.

Reşit Paşa was the first Ottoman ruler to consider the problem of simplifying the Turkish language²⁰. He actually aimed at making the process of mass education easier. Later, in the 60ies, the "Young Ottomans" gave this issue a political perspective – if Turkish were made easier to learn, this would prove to be a stimulus for non-Turkish people to master it, and finally facilitate the process of Ottomanization²¹.

Assessing Reşit's ideas as a whole it is necessary to mention that they were of great significance in the history of socio-political thought in the Ottoman Empire in XIX c. In developing and generalizing some principles, propounded by former generations of Turkish rulers, as well as putting some new ones to the fore, he provided the basis of the concept of merger.

2. Main ideas of concept of merger

In the 50ies and 60ies of XIX c., the leaders of the reform movement of the second stage of Tanzimat Mehmed Emm Âli Paşa and Mehmed Fuat Paşa gave the main outline of the new ideological and political concept, which was based on the idea of merger of all nations of multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. If it were to be analyzed in their interpretation, attention should be paid to several details: first, they did not employ the term "concept of merger", but rather the French word "fusion" (merger), or the Turkish phrase "mezc-ü telifi" (merger and reconciliation) and second, the Concept of merger is nowhere propounded in its entirety.

On the other hand, a careful analysis of the documentary material bearing on Âli and Fuat's activity, including their writings on the subject, allow for a reconstruction of the main tenets of the "concept of merger" to be made. Besides, it

will be demonstrated that these political leaders, being of highly practical nature, not only propounded certain principles, but also endeavored to apply them in practice.

Âli and Fuat considered the merger of all inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire independent of their nationality or religious beliefs to be the only way of preserving its entirety. In May 1867, Fuat Paşa shared his views on this problem with the Russian Ambassador in Constantinople, Nikolay P. Ignatiev, who after his talks with Fuat, reported in Petersburg: "He (i. e. Fuat) is persistent in his belief that the Empire could only be saved through the merger of the Muslim and Christian population, and not their parallel co-existence"²².

Turkish political leaders in confidential documents treated the necessity of merger, too. In a lâyiha, addressed to Sultan Abdülaziz, not intended to go to press (1867), Âli Paşa wrote: "The merger of all subjects is the only means of preventing the coming danger (i. e., the collapse of the Empire — R. S.)"²³. At the end of his life, Fuat once again warned the Sultan that if the merger were not realized, the existence of the Ottoman Empire seemed to him to have no perspective²⁴. Other similar statements made by Âli and Fuat could be cited. Their determination to realize the merger could hardly be doubted.

The question arises, however, of the extent to which the merger was to be realized. Fuat Paşa wrote that it was to spread over the whole area of social relations, with the exception of purely religious matters. He specifies at this point that Christian population have, overall, two religions: the first of them moral, while the second is political. As far as the moral religion is concerned, it can be entirely ignored. The political religion, however, should be treated with utmost caution, as very often certain theories originate from it that run counter to the existence of the Empire²⁵. "Pure religion", to employ Âli and Fuat's phrase, was, to their mind just "moral" religion. Being entirely harmless with respect to the foundations of the Ottoman state, it was to remain the only distinctive feature among the Sultan's subjects. There was to be no other difference among them.

Âli and Fuat did not provide a concrete answer as to the language of the prospective "integrated" society. Obviously, they had not fully realized the significance of the mother tongue and the important role it had in preserving national specifics. The documents they issued mention nothing about the state language, though Turkish (Ottoman) functioned as such in the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman leaders from the generation of Âli and Fuat mainly dealt with religious matters, and confessional distinctions drew their attention more than ethnic or linguistic ones.

Nevertheless, certain nuances in their conception imply that there exists a certain trend in Âli and Fuat's views towards consolidating the status of Turkish as an official language. In his lâyiha Âli Paşa stated that "any person who wishes to receive a job (i. e. Christian subjects — R. S.), was expected to be able to read and write in Turkish"²⁶. In the lâyiha on the Greek revolts Fuat, much to his regret,

noted that Christian villagers could not write in Turkish²⁷. Âli and Fuat were in favor of simplifying the Turkish language, which would facilitate its general use²⁸.

The idea of the future integrated society, where Muslims and Christians would "merge", was rather vague. Fuat wrote that this "great Empire (i. e. the Ottoman Empire — R. S.) could belong neither to the Greeks, nor to the Slavs, nor to any single religion or nationality. The Eastern Empire can exist only if there is unity among all the people in the East"²⁹. It was to remain the Empire of the Sultan-Khalif's subjects. Fuat, however, noted that whatever transformations were made, the four pillars on which the existence of the Empire was founded were to remain intact: those were "the Muslim millet, the Turkish state, the Ottoman Sultans and Istanbul, as a capital"³⁰.

Âli Paşa numerously emphasized the specific role of the Turkish people in the new integrated society. In a letter to the French Ambassador in Constantinople Thouvenel (1858), he wrote, "If there still exists a people, which can govern the others and serve... as a link between the communities that is the Ottoman people (i. e., the Turks — R. S.)"³¹. He expressed this view once again in a confidential message to the Ottoman Ambassador in France, Cemil Paşa (1862)³². This reliance on the Turkish element is less pronounced by Fuat. He also considered, however, that the Turkish were better suited to governing the country than other peoples³³. As it is evident from the above-mentioned facts, the final aim Âli and Fuat kept in mind was the preservation of the Turkish dominance in the future reformed Empire.

One of the most important questions, the solution of which would reflect on the existence of the prospective "integrated society", was the question of the political rights of its members. Formally, Âli Paşa and Fuat Paşa were in favor of equal rights for all subjects. If certain statements of Âli and Fuat are to be taken into consideration, they believed that Muslims and Christians should enjoy equal political rights. Both of them, however, firmly stated that Islam should preserve its status of dominating religion. The co-existence of political equality and the preservation of the leading role of Islam in Ottoman Empire in the middle of XIX c. were hardly possible. Therefore, Âli and Fuat's promises, though going further beyond the principles Reşit Paşa proposed and even envisaged the possibility for Christians to occupy government posts, were of purely tactical nature. This is confirmed by their reluctance in allowing Christians to occupy high government posts.

Âli and Fuat proposed a number of measures to aid the realization of their ideas. The most significant one was the fostering in all nations of the Empire a "unanimous spirit" of loyalty to the government. "The government may avoid ideological differences among its subjects if it fosters a spirit of unanimity in all of them" - Âli Paşa wrote³⁴. The establishment of mixed educational institutions - primary and secondary - was considered as the first step in that direction, as "merger starts at the school desk", Fuat pointed out³⁵. Education would then be resumed at colleges like Galatasaray, wrote Âli Paşa³⁶. In his opinion, the

integrated education would "unite the interests" of the different nations in the Empire and make them loyal to the Ottoman government³⁷. He also noted that the establishment of mixed Muslim-Christian schools, enjoying a high level of teaching would dissuade non-Muslims from sending their children abroad where they were brought up in an anti-Turkish spirit³⁸.

Another means of accomplishing the merger was the admittance of Christians in the army. Among Turkish government figures, Fuat was the most fervent supporter of the idea and he drew up even a program for the establishment of mixed volunteer formations, N. P. Ignatiev reported in Petersburg³⁹. This problem "attracted the attention in Turkey" and was discussed in the Higher Council, the Russian military agent in Constantinople reported⁴⁰. The admittance of Christians in Ottoman army considered the import step in right direction by Western powers too. As the French ambassador in the Ottoman Empire Marquis de Moustillet wrote, the enrollment of Christians in the army would serve "a certain moral integration", as well as "the creation of a common spirit"⁴¹. Baron Prokesch, the Austrian Ambassador to Constantinople, wrote, "Nothing would have a greater impact on the merger of nations, than the creation of a military system, based on general admittance in the army"⁴². The larger part of the Turkish ministers wanted that all officer posts should be occupied by Turks⁴³. A special commission was formed to study the problem thoroughly, which, however, did not reach a conclusion. The idea was supported neither by the Christians, nor by the Muslims⁴⁴. At the end of his life, Fuat was also disillusioned with it, not even mentioning it in his political testament.

Non-Muslim millets (religious communities) were a major obstacle on the way to establishing "an integrated" society. In the middle of the 50ies, leaders of Tanzimat reached the conclusion that millets enjoyed too great an autonomy, thus interfering with the merger. They believed millets were to be transformed into purely religious communities, while their civil competence was to be eliminated. Ali Paşa wrote, "Each community (millet) is a separate unit, with its peculiar spirit, language, customs, and aspirations. Their development may slip out of control... The government ought to assign each community only the right to deal with purely religious questions..."⁴⁵ The Hatt-ı Hümayun from 1856 reflects this position, upheld by Âli. Fuat was against the attempt of Armenian constitutionalists to establish national councils at the patriarchates because this would run counter to Mahmud II's decrees on the "spiritual rule" of the patriarch⁴⁶. In May 1867, Ignatiev reported from İstanbul, "The Porte did not approve of the creation of a new Armenian constitution, an idea advanced by their most progressive party. The members of the commission working on the project visited Fuat and received a tentative reply"⁴⁷.

If all measures promoting the merger were to be taken, certain changes in the political structure of the government were due to occur, Âli and Fuat consciously supporting this trend. Fuat prompted the Sultan to undertake the necessary reforms as soon as possible⁴⁸. Âli, being more cautious, realized that the

"rate" of reform, as he said "was to be in constant check by the fear of the boiler bursting"⁴⁹. The major and nearest goal of the merger Âli and Fuat preached was to deal a blow on the national-liberation movement of Christian peoples of Ottoman Empire. They believed it had caught over from "the sparkle of dissent" coming from Europe, and was utterly devoid of any real grounds in the Ottoman Empire, being just artificially stirred up from abroad (Fuat)⁵⁰. Another possible reason was "the national spirit"⁵¹ of Christian subjects. It is the lack of understanding of the essence and real causes for the national-liberation movements that fostered in Turkish leaders an illusion that they could be suppressed.

The main tenets of the doctrine of merger, that have been treated, form the basis of the corps of ideas of some rulers from the end of XVIII and the first half of XIX c. Âli Paşa and Fuat Paşa, however, often lent them new contents. Thus, the idea taken over from the initiator of reforms of Tanzimat Reşit Paşa about the education of the population was formulated by Âli as the concept of fostering of "a spirit of loyalty" to the Ottoman government in all Ottoman subjects. Pointing out that in order to achieve "integrity", "it is insufficient, as some notables consider, teaching people to write and read", he wrote, "It is essential that the knowledge people receive should first serve this purpose"⁵² (i. e. the integrity of all "Ottomans" — R. S.).

On the other hand, certain European states exerted strong influence while the doctrine of merger was being worked out. Besides the so-called "equality in rights", they also favored the admittance of Christians in the army. The English ambassador in Turkey Canning (Lord Stratford de Radcliff) was especially active in the realization of this idea. Moreover, the British government aimed at the reinforcement of the Turkish army, hoping to confront it with Russia, as well as at the elimination the tax of *haraç*, one of the most humiliating exactions for Christians⁵³.

The Porte, forced to give in to the pressure its mighty ally exerted, tried to ensure the privileged position of Muslims in the army. The Sultan proclamation (its author most likely being Âli) stated, first, Muslims are more numerous; and second, they are "used to carrying arms"⁵⁴. When this question was discussed in the future, the first issue that was taken into consideration was the "fostering" of a spirit of loyalty to the Ottoman government in Muslims and Christians.

3. Legislative reforms aiming to merger Muslims and Christians

One of the salient aspects in the policy of the Porte in the 1850-60ies was to achieve, by way of reforms in different spheres of government management a merger of the various nations living in the country. Little attention has been paid in Turkish studies to this particular aspect of the policy of Tanzimat. One of the leaders of the Tanzimat, Fuat Paşa, considered, by the way, that "all efforts in the domain of home policy should be directed at achieving a single purpose: the merger of the different races"⁵⁵. Merger was taken by Turkish rulers in the 50-60ies to be the main, and even the only way of preserving the entirety of the Empire and coping with the national liberation movement of the Christian peoples. They had drawn up a long-term program, and all reformer activity in the period after the Crimean war was devoted to its realization.

As has already been noted, an important place in the program of merger was occupied by measures taken, meant to transform millets into purely religious institutions by way of eliminating their traditional privileges in the sphere of civil management. It is not by chance that the text of the Hatt-ı Hümayun from February, 1856, contained an article, providing the realization of this idea: spiritual leaders of the millets, traditionally enjoying unrestricted power and acting as a kind of go-between whenever the essential rights of the ordinary millet members were violated by the Turkish authorities, were deprived of the right to deal with civil cases. The latter were presented to special councils (meclis), comprising clerical and secular officials⁵⁶. In this way patriarchs were withdrawn the right of fully representing the interests of their parish before the Porte, while the newly founded councils were not given it, either. The introduction of this article in the text of the hatt initiated the attempts at administratively destroying the centuries-old system of millets, ensuring certain autonomy of non-Muslim nations in the internal life of the community, and replacing it for a system of purely religious units, devoid of any privileges in the civil sphere of life. Ten years later, in March 1866, a governmental circular letter was issued, confirming this article of the hatt-ı Hümayun: spiritual leaders were forbidden to present to the Porte the so-called *tahrir*'s (grievances), going beyond purely religious matters⁵⁷.

Still another trend in the policy of merger could be discerned in the Hatt-ı Hümayun — the establishment of immediate control of the authorities over the activity of non-Muslim millets through involving their top circles within the Ottoman administrative system. One of the articles of the firman envisaged payment to the millets' spiritual leaders, thus making them government clerks⁵⁸. Other articles in the sultan decree were meant to provide conditions for facilitating the merger by way of establishing formal equality with respect to the rights Muslims and non-Muslims enjoyed, the establishing of the principle of equal representation in mixed meclis, etc.⁵⁹ These measures were aimed at winning the loyalty of the Christian peoples to the Turkish authorities.

All inhabitants of the Empire, despite their national or religious affiliations, were denoted in the Hatt-ı Hümayun as "subjects of the High Authority" (*tebaa-ı*

Dev-let-i Aliyye), "subjects of the Sacred Authority" (tebaa-ı Devlet-i Seniyye), "the Sultan's subjects" (tebaa-ı Şahane). As R. Davison notes, this fact reflected the desire of the authors of the hatt to eliminate "barriers among millets" and establish a common citizenship for all nations within the Empire⁶⁰. It is in the text of the Hatt-ı Hümayun that the Ottoman term corresponding to "patriotism" was used for the first time - i. e., the word *vatançılık*⁶¹. The hatt, however, was not essentially a legislative act; it only outlined the reforms that were to be introduced in legislation in the future. This was actually done in the 1860ies.

The Tanzimat leaders considered administrative reforms to be of great importance. The vilayet reform they realized was not by chance thought to be a most important step in providing the conditions for carrying out the merger. In his brochure, anonymously published in Paris, Âli Paşa, while evaluating the so-called "Organic Department Law, made up under the name of the Danube Vilayet", which was accepted in 1864 and underlay the 1867 Vilayet Law and the Law of universal vilayet government from 1871, stated that "no measure had been taken by that time that suited better the interests of all the population, irrespective of nationality and religion" in the Ottoman Empire until that law was published⁶². A detailed account of its contents would make salient those specific forms that the policy of merger in administration took, as realized by the Tanzimat leaders⁶³.

The "Law" stipulated that all inhabitants within the Danube vilayet, which encompassed a considerable part of Bulgaria, were proclaimed "subjects of the High State", no matter what religion community they belonged to. One of the major tenets of Concept of merger was thus established in the legislative system. Non-Muslims obtained the right of equal representation in the administrative councils at all levels (*vilayet, sancak, and kaza* councils)⁶⁴. However, owing to the fact that the Muslim population of the vilayet was mainly represented by Turks, while non-Muslims were not only Bulgarians, but also Greeks, Armenians, Jews, etc., Muslims in the meclis automatically had the majority. The introduction of the principle of "equal representation of Muslims and non-Muslims" in the particular conditions of the Danube vilayet, where non-Muslim men were about twice as many⁶⁵, was practically aimed at ensuring Muslims a disproportionably greater representation in the meclis.

The study of the corresponding articles in the "Law" comes to show that in spite of the declaration of the notorious principle of "equal representation", it contained certain articles that legitimized the larger representation of Muslims in the newly founded meclis of different levels. They envisaged the establishing of vilayet administrative meclis, amounting to 11 members, headed by a vali. Only six of them (three Muslims and three non-Muslims) were elected, while the other five became members of the staff "by appointment": the vali (head of the meclis), the inspector of the Sharia courts, the person in charge of financial matters of the vilayet and the one in charge of foreign affairs⁶⁶. All these higher vilayet clerks were in their absolute majority Turks. Thus, only three or four out of the eleven members of the meclis were non-Muslim. The same correlation could be found in

the sancak⁶⁷ and kaza meclis⁶⁸. The Law of 1864 stipulated that Christians could be elected in the meclis. Considerable space has been allotted in the text to the problem of the organization of elections for the councils of different levels (articles 67-82)⁶⁹. A careful study of these articles, however, will show that their formulation ensured the election of non-Muslim persons who would be willing to co-operate with the authorities. Elections were organized by the local authorities, who were thus able to control their course. High property qualifications were set up for the candidates, its amount depending on the level of the meclis. Thus, if a man applying for the Council of elders was obliged to pay yearly taxes amounting to 50 kuruş at least, an applicant for the vilayet administrative Council (meclis) was required to pay 500 kuruş⁷⁰. This fact clearly testifies to the lawmakers' intention to lean on well-to-do-circles of the population (including non-Muslims), while realizing their policy.

Central organs of government were also submitted to merger - imbued reorganizations. In March 1867, two new organs were set up instead of the Higher Juridical Council: the State Council and the Council of Jurisdiction. The State Council was attached special importance by the Porte⁷¹. Sultan Abdul Aziz's speech on the occasion of the establishment of the new organs gives an idea about the aims pursued by the main initiators for the creation of the Council - Âli Paşa and Fuat Paşa. It largely echoed the ideas of the supporters of merger that all inhabitants of the Empire, irrespective of their religious affiliations, are "children of the same fatherland" and hence "should not look upon each other with hostility and contempt". It was stated in the speech that the members of both Councils "should think of our Empire as an organism, made up of the unity of our subjects"⁷². Non-Muslims were also appointed in the councils. The composition of their staff, however, did not reflect the actual correlation among the various peoples and ethno-confessional groups of the Empire. Thus, out of 41 members of the State Council, only 13 were non-Muslims⁷³. Midhat Paşa, a staunch supporter of merger, was appointed as Head of the Council. In general, the establishing of the State Council was another step on the way to implanting the ideas of Concept of merger in the government and administrative system of the Ottoman Empire.

In the program of merger, the "ideological merger" of the nations within the Empire was considered of special importance. Only the fostering of a "common spirit" of loyalty to the Sultan and the "Ottoman fatherland" would prepare the grounds for realizing the merger. Two means were suggested for attaining this aim - a mixed Muslim-Christian system of education, and mixed military units. Some attempts at introducing the principle of mixed education in the educational system were undertaken in the first period of Tanzimat. Turkish leaders, however, did not back up the idea legislatively until the 1860ies. In 1860, a government decree was issued, noting the necessity for admitting Christians in Muslim schools, thus enabling them to receive an education imbued with the "spirit of the government" and possibly later utilize at a government post⁷⁴. The decree, however, did not come to be fully applied in practice. It was strongly opposed by both Muslims, who

considered mixed education of children to contradict the spirit of Islam, and by Christians, who guessed what the government really aimed at: "by means of this measure to weaken the sense of nationality and religion" in them⁷⁵.

Tanzimat leaders, however, were persistent. In 1869, the "Popular Education Law" was published. This large document comprised 196 articles and incorporated the ideas apologists of merger nourished about the "purposeful fostering" in non-Turkish nations of a spirit of loyalty to the "Ottoman fatherland"⁷⁶. The analysis of its contents reveals two main directions in the policy of merger in the field of education. First, the disintegration of the advanced system of popular education of the Christian nations, and second, enhancing government control over it and the establishment of a new net of educational institutions with the ultimate goal of realizing the "ideological merger" of all inhabitants of the country.

The Law stipulated that all schools in the Ottoman Empire were divided in two categories: state and private. Non-Muslim children were mainly sent to private schools. Article 1 stated that they should be directly controlled by the state. The Hatt-I Hümayun from 1856 envisaged the establishing of special meclis, which were to deal with the problems of education and control the schools of oppressed Christian peoples. The authors of the 1869 Law, considering this article too "liberal", decided that non-Muslim schools should be directly supervised by the government. This law is the first to give shape to the idea of the "purposeful" fostering in non-Muslim subjects, of a spirit of loyalty to the Sultan and the "Ottoman fatherland". It is this goal that the articles of the Law on mixed education served.

This principle was implemented in second-degree schools. As it is obvious from article 38, the curriculum in the so-called mixed schools *idadiye* did not include special subjects for non-Muslim children, except for religion classes. This rendered non-Turkish children prone to denationalization. The leaders of Tanzimat did not have the courage to introduce the principle of "mixed education" in first-degree primary schools. They obviously bore in Midhat's mind failure in the Danube vilayet. In predominantly Christian-populated settlements the Law made a provision that besides sbyan schools for Muslims, primary state schools should be set up for Christian children exclusively. At a first glance, this provision seems rather favorable for subjected peoples. Article 6, however, makes it clear that this is far from being so. It is obvious from the school program, published in it that subjects in the history and literature of the respective people were not meant to be studied in such schools. It is worth noting that the building of these schools had to be financed by the local Christian communities . . . Christian children, who graduated mixed or "purely" Muslim schools, had the opportunity, provided by the 1869 law, to study in High schools whose graduates were later expected to be employed as loyal Porte officials. The first institution of this type was the famous Galatasaray College, whose regulations were published by the Porte in 1868. The purpose that lay behind the establishing of the college is formulated in Article 1:

"The education and upbringing in the interest of the Empire of young people from all classes of the Ottoman state's subjects"⁷⁷. This formulation reflects a point of view, shared by apologists of merger, that non-Muslims could occupy government posts after the respective "training".

The official documents we have treated so far testify to the fact that in the field of education Tanzimat leaders were most successful in their efforts at providing a legislative basis of the concept of merger. On the one hand, these laws dealt a severe blow on the advanced system of education of the oppressed Christian nations, and on the other — a net of unified state schools was created aimed at engraining the "all-Ottoman spirit" in all subjects of the Sultan. Âli Paşa and Fuat Paşa attempts at setting up mixed military units were considerably less successful. In May 1855, the idea of admitting non-Muslims in the army was for the first time put forward for legislative shaping up. A Sultan *irade* was published, abolishing the *haraç* and declaring obligatory military service for the entire population of the Empire. This document, written in the typical language of the Tanzimat epoch claimed that since non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire enjoyed "well being and prosperity, ensured by the fairness of laws", they had to do military service together with the Muslims. "Only Muslim subjects have done their duty so far - the *irade* said - but the fatherland's defense is everybody's obligation"⁷⁸.

Besides calling in Christians to participate in the defense of the common fatherland, the *irade* made a point of stating that the dominant position of Muslims in the "mixed" army should be preserved. This statement was supported by the argument that they were "used to" carrying arms, as it were, and besides, they comprise the majority of the Empire's population. The Law, in fact, provided the "utilization" of non-Muslim subjects as cannon fodder in the defense of the collapsing Empire. The 1855 Law was strongly opposed both by Muslims and by Christians. Most Muslims thought it out of the question for *gâvur* to be allowed to carry arms. Christian subjects, on the other hand, could not accept the idea of shedding their blood in defense of the regime they abhorred. The 1855 Law remained but a sheet of paper and no mixed units were organized after it was issued.

In the beginning of the 1860ies, this question came to the fore again. Nevertheless, Âli Paşa and Fuat Paşa did not manage to incorporate one of the main ideas of the doctrine of merger into a law. Only the admittance of Christians in police corps was legislatively supported in the Tanzimat period. The intensification of the policy of merger in the 1860ies was accompanied by reinforced persecution in the cultural and social life of the Christian nations. This fact is not surprising because the elimination of the little autonomy in internal life, traditionally enjoyed by Christian communities, was one of the aims of the Concept of merger. The authorities were greatly worried by the activity of the Balkan and Armenian press, which was in a flourishing state after the Crimean war, and by the upsurge of national-liberation movements. They tried to put it under their immediate control by means of "legislative" measures. A law was

published in 1865 concerning the press. Article 1 stated that not a single periodical in the Ottoman Empire could be founded or issued, no matter what language it was written in, without the government's permission⁷⁹.

It is interesting to note that the Porte tried to justify these measures by the necessity for preserving the so-called "unity of the Ottoman subjects". In 1867, Âli Paşa had to sign an official decree on intensifying government control over the press. With this act, the Porte was granted the right to close down any periodical including those, published in the non-Turkish languages of the Empire, in case they aroused even the slightest doubts in their loyalty. Among the editions, considered to be "inconvenient", were the ones that stood in the way of "unity of minds and merger of interests"⁸⁰. This formulation referred to all the activities accompanying the national liberation upsurge of the Christian peoples on the pages of the press and was severely persecuted as running counter to the official policy of merger. The legislative acts from the 1860ies also incorporated the ideas of those supporters of the doctrine of merger who were in favor of the wide spread of Turkish as an official language of the Empire, knowledge of it being necessary for occupying a government post. This fact was clearly indicated in the 1867 law, concerning the appointment of inspector-clerks⁸¹. The ability to "speak Turkish" was one of the requirements to applicants for the police force⁸². A similar aim was pursued with the so-called "literacy qualifications", established by administrative laws for the candidate-members of the *meclis* on different levels. In order to be elected in the *kazâ* administrative meclis, for example, the candidate had to be able to read and write. Even though the language was left unspecified, it was implicit that it had to be the language of the dominant nation. The only language used in the electoral organs, which were to demonstrate "the unity and harmony" among the different nations in the Empire, was Turkish.

Efforts of Âli Paşa and Fuat Paşa at introducing the Concept of merger in the legislative system of the country were crowned by the law from 1869 on Ottoman citizenship. The first article of this act proclaimed all inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, irrespective of their national or confessional affiliations, to be "subjects of the Ottoman Empire"⁸³. This law was ostensibly favorable for non-Muslims, as this was the first occasion when their right to be called "subjects" together with Muslims, was explicitly stated. This act also formally eliminated the centuries-old religious discrimination, so typical for based on Muslim legislation state systems. As the Turkish specialist H. Fişek justly notes, this was the first law in Muslim states on citizenship, which was devoid of religiousness⁸⁴. The actual significance of this law, however, lay somewhere else. It was aimed at depriving non-Turkish nations of their national specificity. From that moment on, all inhabitants of the Empire were "Ottoman subjects" and not Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians . . . This was an important step towards the merger of population the multi-national Empire.

Summing up the analysis made of the contents of the most important official acts, passed by the Porte in the period of the Tanzimat reforms after the

Crimean war, it could be noted that the initiators of the policy of merger were able to realize their program legislatively just partially. Many important points did not come to life. There not existed a well-functioning and strictly centralized system, which would provide the basis for the merger. The educational and military transformations, aimed at creating a "common spirit", did not reflect the respective ideas in their entirety. The authors themselves were aware of this. At the end of his life, while estimating the results of his and Fuat's work on higher government posts, Âli Paşa bitterly noted, "We proved to be helpless"⁸⁵.

4. Policy of merger on the local level: Ottomanization of Bulgaria

The character of the policy of merger could be best traced in the process of "Ottomanization" of population of the Danube vilayet, comprising the larger part of Bulgaria. It is here that the new policy was most fully and consistently realized. This choice was not occasional. In case of success, the Porte would convince both the West and Europe that it not only kept the promises given in the Hatt-ı Hümayun from 1856, but also effectively ruled one of the most advanced and potentially dangerous regions in European Turkey. Aali and Fuad also had in mind experimenting with new methods of neutralizing the violent national-liberation movement of the Bulgarian people. This decision was also influenced by the fact that Bulgaria was not far from the capital, thus enabling the authorities to exercise immediate control and eventually correct the policy of the local authorities.

The policy of Ottomanization in Bulgaria was initiated with the introduction of the new vilayet system. A Sultan irade from November 1864, proclaimed the foundation of the so-called Danube vilayet in the place of the former Nis, Vidin and Silistria *eyalets*⁸⁶. The new vilayet included the main part of territory of former Bulgarian Kingship – the Danubian and Western Bulgaria, including the district of Kŭstenci⁸⁷. This new established vilayet had had territory of 86 000 m² with the population about 3 millions⁸⁸, the majority of which was Bulgarian⁸⁹.

Ahmed Midhat Pasha was appointed *vali* (general-governor) of the Danube vilayet. It would be a mistake to think of this appointment as occasional. By that time, Mid-hat had earned himself a reputation of an energetic, business-like governor, with an European outlook. This fame he gained when serving between 1860 and 1863 *vali* of the Nish vilayet: His fame as pro-European governor was a considerable asset for Aali Pasha and Fuad Pasha. They even considered his opinion while drafting the text of the law on the formation of the Danube vilayet⁹⁰. Besides, the leaders of Tanzimat movement Midhat was regarded by Bulgarians as relatively pro-Bulgarian.

The ideas underlying the Sultan irade and the law on the formation of the Danube vilayet were largely aimed at enhancing the process of Ottomanization of that region of the Empire. Thus, in the irade, officially read by Midhat before the citizens of Rusçuk (Ruse) and foreign councils, it was written, "all political, financial and administrative institutions should function as a unified, well-run, and constantly controllable body"⁹¹. This was in unison with the instructions Midhat

had been given. An active and persistent ruler as he was, he stuck to them in the course of his governorship, at times interpreting them in accordance with his views. The main task, as he saw it and later wrote, was to 'cement' all nations and create a common fatherland for all of them, "which would render them insensitive to any influence coming from abroad"⁹².

"Ottomanization" of Bulgarian schools was an important component in Midhat' policy in the Danube vilayet. First, he tried to act by sheer force. In the summer of 1865, Tyrnovo citizens were "offered" to erect the building of a mixed Muslim-Christian school, "located at an equal distance from the Turkish and from the Christian quarters". Bulgarians were ordered to close down the local national school and submit the money collected by the Bulgarian community for its maintenance, to the town authorities⁹³. Thus a town, where Bulgarians comprised 65 percent of the population, was deprived of its school. It is hardly surprising that at its session the Bulgarian community in Tyrnovo did not flinch from its refusal to satisfy the ambitions of the authorities⁹⁴. Midhat Pasha was forced to give up further similar attempts for a time. From that moment on, he acted more "subtly", trying first to attract the representatives of the Bulgarian population. He managed to obtain the support of the local Bulgarian notables. They were all included in the mixed Bulgarian-Turkish commission, which was to draft the project of the respective reform⁹⁵. In spite of the fact that specially chosen people sat in the commission, it was a long time before they could reach an agreement. Because of the considerable pressure Midhat Pasha had exerted on the members of the commission, however, the project text was finally sanctioned in several months' time⁹⁶.

The main point in this large document, comprising of 72 articles, was the government decree on mixed education from 1860. It also contained Midhat's own suggestions. One of them was to do away with all Christian schools, except for those of the "Lancaster" type of the first degree, after whose graduation Christian children would go on to mixed schools. The finances Christian communities allotted for the maintenance of these schools were, from that time on, to be made available to the government funds and employed for the keeping of the mixed schools. The building of mixed schools was to be financed by the communities themselves, and not by the authorities. In case a shortage of financial means appeared, Midhat Pasha proposed the introduction of an additional tax⁹⁷.

Midhat's propositions were clearly anti-Bulgarian and were meant at fully eradicating the wide set of Bulgarian national schools of the second degree. This was actually the new element he introduced in the contents of the 1860 government decree. He, however, tried to create the opposite impression on Bulgarians. Addressing the representatives of the Bulgarian and Turkish communities in Rusçuk (Ruse), he stated that on the timely realization of this program depended the happiness of both Turkish and Bulgarian children, and this was a constant preoccupation of the Turkish government⁹⁸.

Several mixed schools were set up in the Danube vilayet. The one in Rusçuk was considered the most famous. The descriptions, left by contemporaries, however, show that education in this "exemplary" school was at an extremely low level, there was a lack of qualified teachers and textbooks, school curricula were drawn negligently . . . Its contemporaries shared the opinion that it was largely inferior to Bulgarian schools⁹⁹. It should be noted, that Bulgarian language was not one of the subjects on the program, as, Midhat stated, only the study of Turkish could guarantee Bulgarian children a happy future "so that they could serve both the Sultan and their fellow-countrymen"¹⁰⁰. Turkish rulers were definitely successful in establishing mixed schools, which was not the case where primary education is concerned. It is well known that Midhat Pasha was in favor of engraining the "Ottoman spirit" as early as childhood. It is not by chance that the project he drafted for reforms in the system of primary education envisaged the establishing of mixed schools for eight-to-ten year-old children.

At the end of 1865 Midhat "seriously under-took setting up mixed primary schools in the large towns of the vilayet"¹⁰¹. He was seriously opposed, however, both by Turkish, and by Bulgarian population. The Turkish were dissatisfied, as they considered it contemptible for their children to study together with the *gâvurs*. Most Bulgarians were aware of the aims pursued by the government. They shared the opinion that common studies with children from the dominant nation would cause them to lose their sense of national belonging. The opposition proved to be so persistent that the authorities had to give up their plan for a time. The vali, however, was once again insistent. He decided to proceed by different methods. In the autumn of 1867, the vilayet meclis was presented a project, based on the reform program of the educational system, drafted earlier by Midhat Pasha. Despite the approval of some Bulgarian members of the meclis, it was not ratified. Mixed primary schools in the Danube vilayet did not come into being.

The authorities were even less successful in their attempts to set up mixed Muslim-Christian military units. At the beginning of his activity as vali, Midhat-pasha had in mind creating mixed police forces. He did not manage to realize this intention at a larger scale; however, Christians in those units were very few. Attempts were also made at admitting Bulgarians into the 40 thousand troops the authorities recruited to fight the rebels¹⁰².

While summing up the policy of the Turkish authorities aimed at the Ottomanization of Danube Bulgaria, it should be emphasized that it largely failed. The intensification of the national-liberation movement was not held in check. The measures taken for engraining in Bulgarians a spirit of loyalty to the Sultan and their merger within the composition of the "Ottoman nation" were not very successful, either. The Bulgarian answer to Ottomanization was the enhanced struggle for political and national liberation. The armed April uprising from 1876 and its cruel suppression by the Turkish punitive troops marked the collapse of this policy and demonstrated its lack of historical perspective. The failure in the Danube vilayet, considered by Turkish rulers "a model for the whole Empire",

played the decisive role for the temporary rejection of the policy of merger all over the Empire.

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 97. *Kozhevnikov to Ignat'ev*, 12/24 January 1866, AVPRI, dossier "Posol'stvo v Konstantinopole", 1866, file 2182b, sheet 25ob.
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