

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE 1850-1922 - UNAVOIDABLE FAILURE?

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It is a safe assumption that a state can be deemed to have failed in its primary functions if it has shown itself incapable of defending its territory and of keeping together its population. Judged by these standards the Ottoman State of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century was a failure. Having already lost control of large sections of its territories in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century to the expansionist Russian Empire on the one hand and indigenous nationalist movements (Serbian and Greek) on the other, the empire suffered two more great waves of territorial losses in 1877-78 (when Romania and Bulgaria came into existence, Bosnia was lost to the Austrians and the easternmost parts of Anatolia to Russia) and finally in 1912-1920. In this final wave first almost all European possessions were lost to the young national states of the Balkans in the Balkan Wars and then the Arab provinces were lost to the British Empire in World War I. The possessions thus lost had been Ottoman for between four and five hundred years and they all shared an Ottoman legacy.¹ In the case of the Balkan provinces, they had also been the most advanced, most densely populated and richest provinces, as well as being home to a disproportionately large part of the Ottoman ruling elite.

The continued military and political weakness of the Ottoman Empire was very apparent to the European policy makers of the day. After all: the term “Eastern Question” was used throughout Europe as diplomatic shorthand for the way in which continued Ottoman weakness would ultimately endanger the stability of Europe because of the way it would create a power vacuum for competing European great powers to fill.¹ In spite of strenuous efforts on the part of the Ottoman elite to strengthen the state through the adoption of European technology and practice, very few doubted even late in the Nineteenth Century, after more than fifty years of reforms, that the empire was moribund.

Contemporary European observers often blamed the continued weakness of the Ottoman state on a lack of understanding on the part of Ottoman reformers about the underlying reasons for Europe’s strength. The reformers were depicted as superficial imitators (“Oriental gentlemen”) and their efforts described as half-hearted. This harsh judgement was shared by the more radical wing of the Young Turk movement after 1908 and still later by the Kemalist movement in the Turkish Republic.² Disillusioned by the failure of the Nineteenth Century reformers to halt either the encroachments of European imperialism or the rise of indigenous nationalisms, these abandoned the fundamental ideal of the earlier generation, the “Unity of the Ethnic Elements” (*Ittihadî anasîr*) in favour of, first Muslim, and then (after 1923) Turkish nationalism.² In their judgement, which was strongly influenced by social Darwinism of a particular kind (focused on nations rather than on social categories), the reformers of the Nineteenth Century had been naïve and unfit to compete in the struggle for survival between nations.³

¹ See: L. Carl Brown (ed.), *Imperial legacy. The Ottoman imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

² Erik-Jan Zürcher, Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics 1908-1938, in Kemal H. Karpat (ed.), *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey*, Leiden: Brill, 150-179.

³ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparing for a revolution. The Young Turks, 1902-1908*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 292.

It is probably true that the Ottoman reformers were late in recognizing the power of nationalism and the danger it brought to the empire, but it is questionable whether their policies can really be held responsible for the “failure” of the Ottoman Empire. Let us take a fresh look at the two fundamental problems that faced the empire – the maintenance of the external position of the empire, the “defence of the realm”, and the construction of a collective identity, which could underpin imperial rule.

Defence of the realm

The sudden defeats of 1774 and 1792 against Russia, after half a century without major wars, meant that the Ottomans became acutely aware of their military inferiority. The disastrous defeat at the hands of Russia in 1829, which led to a huge number of Muslim refugees from the Black Sea littoral entering the country, made military modernisation even more of a priority. Modernizing the army remained the driving force behind the whole complex of reforms, at least until 1856. The transition to an army dressed, equipped and commanded in the European manner was made from 1826 with the founding of the “Well-trained Victorious Soldiers of Muhammad” (*Muallem Asakiri Mansureyi Muhammadiye*). Conscription on the Prussian model, with a standing army, an active reserve and a militia, was introduced in 1844. Conscription was by drawing of lots among age classes, as in Europe.⁴

If the initial impetus was military and modernisation of the army and establishment of a monopoly of legitimate violence always remained one of the top priorities, in their efforts to achieve these goals the reformers were forced to cast the net of modernisation ever more widely. The building of an army entailed a need for a census, for efficient recruitment, for the construction of barracks and the improvement of roads and bridges. Enhancing state control was dependent on communications, which translated into the building of an extended network of telegraph cables from the Eighteen Fifties onwards and of trunk railways from the Eighteen Eighties. The reforms created their own need for modern educational establishments (and a market for their graduates).⁵ The utilitarian drive behind the creation of the new schools is shown by the fact that a university on the European model was founded only at the very end of the century – remarkable, considering the enormous development of the Humboldtian university in the European countries, which the Ottomans took for their model, in this very period. Instead of universities, the Ottomans created professional colleges to turn out engineers and architects, (military) doctors and veterinaries, accountants and administrators.

The bureaucrats of the fast-growing state machinery felt the need for clear hierarchical relationships, division of labour and regular pay and over the century, through the issuing of endless regulations something resembling Weber’s model of a rational bureaucracy came into existence,³ thus paralleling the growth of a European-style officer corps in the army. Much as one may criticise the reforms for their shallowness, half-heartedness or inefficiency, something resembling a modern centralized state came into existence. Anyone doubting the Ottomans’ achievement in this field need only compare the Turkey of the Nineteen twenties, when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk unleashed his radical secularist and nationalist programme, with the Iran of the same period, in which Reza Shah Pahlevi established his power monopoly. Reza Shah’s policies necessarily aimed at the construction of a modern state where under the last Qajar Shahs royal authority had barely been noticeable outside Teheran and Tebriz and in this sense his position resembled that of the Ottoman sultans Mahmud II (r.

⁴ Erik-Jan Zürcher, The Ottoman conscription system in theory and practice, 1844-1918, *International Review of Social History* 43/3, 437-449.

⁵ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. Vol. 2 Reform, revolution and republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 106-113.

1808-1839) far more than it did that of Atatürk, who had a complete and ruthlessly efficient state apparatus at his disposal, which could be employed to effect a cultural revolution of sorts.⁴

The introduction of a Western-style army with up-to-date equipment and armaments, the building of a state bureaucracy and the investments in infrastructure, limited as they were, meant a dramatic increase in state expenditure. The introduction of conscription in order to compete with European mass armies meant a significant increase in the required manpower. In other words: the two main requirements for successful military reform were money and men. Let us look at money first.

Money and men

The Ottoman Empire was, of course, an agricultural state. Its two most important sources of tax revenue until 1856 were on the one hand the tithe (and similar taxes like the “sheep tax” – *agnam resmi*) and on the other the *cizye*, the tax levied on the “protected” minorities – the Christian and Jewish communities, in exchange for their right to continue to live and worship as distinct confessional groups. Taxes were always imposed on the heads of households and a system of tax farming was in place throughout the empire. Tax farms were normally sold to the highest bidder for three years, but in the Eighteenth Century the lifetime tax farm (*malikane*) had become more usual. Successive governments tried to replace it with direct tax collection throughout the Nineteenth Century, but they never succeeded in fully eradicating the tax farming system. While tax farming was a rational choice on the part of the central government (eliminating the risk of crop failure and the cost of a system of tax collectors paid for by the state), it did tend to increase the tax burden of the peasants, thus ultimately damaging the tax base of that same government. From 1856 onwards, when the Sultan, under pressure from Britain and France, granted equality before the law to non-Muslims, the *cizye* was replaced with a military exemption tax called *bedel* (about which more below). Customs duties, excises, tolls, port- and market fees were among the other sources of state income, most of them also farmed out to contractors.

Trade with Europe, which had been on the increase since the second half of the Eighteenth Century, increased rapidly from 1840 onwards and continued to do so until 1873. Direct investment by Europeans began to grow significantly after the Crimean war (1853), when the empire was viewed as a land of opportunity and attracted serious business as well as many adventurers. After a period of stagnation, which reflected trends in the world economy, trade and investment picked up again after 1896.⁵ However, the central government was in no position to profit financially from this economic expansion. After the signature of the free trade treaty of Balta Limani with Great Britain in 1838 (and similar treaties with other powers shortly after) it lost its freedom of action in the sphere of custom duties and tolls. The political climate after the Crimean War created favourable conditions for borrowing in the European capital markets, but in 1875 the state defaulted on its external debt and it could only restore its credit by handing over a number of important sources of income directly to its foreign creditors, represented by the *Caisse de la Dette Publique Ottomane*, which was created in 1881. The Public Debt Administration was given direct access to a number of important revenue sources of the state, thus further eroding the empire’s fiscal position. The war of 1877-78 also deprived the empire from some of its richest provinces in Europe.

We do not have any reliable figures on total state revenue in the Nineteenth Century. The figures for this period have to be regarded as rough estimates. The first reliable budget

composed with a degree of realism was in fact that put together in 1909 by the financial wizard of the Young Turk regime, Cavit Bey. That budget shows a state income of slightly over 25 million Turkish pounds (27.5 million Pounds Sterling).⁶ To see how that compares to the income of those states with whom the empire had to compete, I have taken the state income for Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary and Russia in 1900, as reported in Mitchell's *Historical Statistics*⁷ (which, incidentally, give no data on the Ottoman Empire). In order to create a basis for comparison, I have used Posthumus's rates of exchange tables⁸ to covert the national currencies into Dutch guilders as a unit of account. The result is as follows:

Great Britain	1680 million
France	1831 million
Austro-Hungary	1321 million
Russia	2113 million
Ottoman Empire	330 million

In other words: the means at the disposal in peacetime of its greatest rival, Russia, were seven times those of the Ottoman state. In any arms race, this would of course be a factor of enormous importance. It also helps to explain the expanding and ultimately crushing debt the Ottomans loaded themselves with. It was not so much the extravagances of the court, as both European and Ottoman critics assumed, but battleships and guns, which accounted for this.

A similar picture emerges when we look at the problem of people. Figures for the Ottoman population are similarly uncertain to those for state income. By the beginning of the Nineteenth Century the population had probably been in decline for over a century. Estimates put the population around 1800 at about 26.000.000.⁹ The need for more effective taxation and the introduction of military conscription turned counting the population into a priority. The first census was taken in 1831-1838, but it was reasonably accurate only in a number of central provinces. The quality of the censuses improved over the next seventy years, but the Ottomans always undercounted their population and in the more inhospitable areas with little state control, such as Kurdistan, Albania or Yemen, the numbers were little more than guesses. On the eve of World War I, the population was stated to be slightly in excess of 21.000.000, but if all the outlying areas are included, a number some five million higher is probably closer to reality.¹⁰ On the face of it, then, the population numbers for 1800 and 1914 are much the same. They reflect a completely different reality, however. In peacetime, especially in the 1880s and 1890s, the Ottoman population showed strong growth, but in the peace settlements of 1878 and 1913 huge tracts of land were lost and these lands had been among the most densely populated. If these provinces had not been lost natural growth would have seen to it that the empire's population in 1914 would have been around 42.5 million instead of 26 million. The empire was caught in a vicious circle: loss of land meant loss of income and population, which in turn decreased its ability to defend itself and led to more loss of land.

Comparisons are telling here. The populations of the major competitors of the Ottoman Empire all grew significantly over the century, as this table shows:

	1851	1901
Great Britain	27.3 million	42.5 million
France	35.8 million	38.5 million
Austria/Austro-Hungary	30.7 million	45.2 million
Russia		126.4 million (1897)
Germany	41 million (1871)	56.4 million
Ottoman Empire	32 million (1844)	26 million

In other words: populations, which had been comparable in size to that of the Ottoman Empire in the early Nineteenth Century, were between 30 and 50 percent larger at the end of the century, while the population of the eternal rival Russia was five times that of the Ottomans.

Looked at in purely military terms, however, the picture was worse and this is because of the huge number of exemptions. Certain categories of Muslims were exempted, like religious scholars and students, pilgrims or residents of Istanbul or the holy places, but the main exempted group was that of the non-Muslims. From the start in 1844, the empire had only conscripted Muslim men into its army. This continued to be the case after full equality before the law had been introduced in 1856. Christians and Jews continued to pay a special exemption tax (*bedel*) until 1909 instead of serving in the army. This reduced the recruitment base of the army in a major way. Until 1878, Christians and Jews made up close to forty percent of the population. They constituted twenty percent even as late as 1914. The actual recruitment base of the army consisted of the male, sedentary, Muslim population. No wonder, then, that the actual recruitment rate was among the lowest in Europe: in peacetime only 0.35 percent of the population was conscripted each year. Fully mobilized, four percent of the population served, as opposed to for instance ten percent in France in World War I.¹¹

The army's problem was not primarily lack of modern hardware. Much of the money borrowed by the state was in fact used to buy modern European arms, but the lack of an industrial base meant that equipment and most of the munitions for the Ottoman guns had to be imported. As wars grew more industrial starting with the American Civil War, the lack of an industrial base became an ever more severe handicap. When World War I broke out, the empire still did not produce heavy artillery shells. It also did not produce enough bandages.

There are no data on overall Ottoman industrial output, but if we look at one vital precondition for industrialisation, coal production, a very clear picture emerges. Coal production in the major Ottoman mining area, the Ereğli coalfields near the Black Sea shore, more than doubled after French interests started developing the local mines in 1896, but by the early 1900s it stood at about 600.000 tons per annum. Compare this to the production of some major European countries in 1900:

Great Britain	229 million metric tons
France	33.4 million
Austro-Hungary	11 million
Russia	16.2 million
Ottoman Empire	0.6 million

Oil could have been an alternative, but it was not. Ottoman troops took the oilfields of Baku in 1918, when they were still among the most important oil producing areas in the world, but the government was forced to withdraw its troops under the armistice of October 1918. Of course, some of the Ottoman Arab provinces would later become major oil producers, but, although important oil reserves had been discovered in Mesopotamia before the war, exploitation did not start until after the peace settlement, when these areas had been lost to the empire.

One final element, which I want to look at in the context of the ability (or failure) of the Ottoman Empire to defend itself, is that of rail transport, which the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 had shown to be of decisive influence on modern warfare. In 1914, the Ottoman Empire

was still largely dependent on coastal shipping for transport of bulk goods (something which made it highly vulnerable in case of war), but the importance of railways had been increasing strongly. The country had 5759 kilometres of railways of all gauges in operation on the eve of World War I.¹² At the same time

Great Britain had	32.623
France	40.770
Germany	63.378
Austro-Hungary	22.981
Russia	62.300
Ottoman Empire	5.759

India, with twice the surface of the Ottoman Empire, had almost exactly ten times as big a rail network. The nature of the Ottoman railway system was also different from that of its European rivals. The railway networks of France and Great Britain resembled a spider's web with lines radiating from the metropolis (Paris or London), thus having a strong integrative effect and enhancing state control. In the continental empires, military considerations, i.e. the necessity to move troops massively and quickly to the borders had been taken into account when granting railway concessions. In the Ottoman Empire this was not the case for the railways built by foreign interests between 1860 and 1890. These were essentially lines constructed to connect ports with productive hinterlands. Only when the German-owned Anatolian railway and Baghdad Railway were built from 1888 onwards and the Hejaz pilgrimage railway from 1901 onwards, did the empire begin to acquire a network which actually connected the interior to the capital and which could play a strategic role.

When discussing the ultimate failure of the Ottoman Empire to defend itself effectively, we should remember these numbers. In a struggle with a country like Russia, which was seven times as rich, five times as populous, produced almost thirty times as much coal and had eleven times as big a rail network, who should be surprised at the outcome?

National cohesion

The loss of territory and the ultimate demise of the Ottoman Empire was not the result of external pressure alone, however, but of the interplay of that pressure with separatist nationalism developed by the non-Muslim communities of the empire. The European idea of political nationalism spread in the wake of the French revolution primarily to those communities, which had the strongest overseas or overland trading networks with Europe: the Greeks and the Serbs. After these two had achieved independence (albeit certainly not to the full extent of their territorial ambitions) Bulgarians, Rumanians, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Armenians followed suit. This spread of nationalist ideologies among the intelligentsia of the Christian communities coincided with the spread of European patronage. The Ottomans had always granted the representatives of foreign powers the right to grant protection to a limited number of local employees, primarily to the embassy interpreters (*dragomans*) who were responsible for contacts with the Ottoman authorities and who were recruited mostly from Levantine (Catholic), but also from Greek orthodox and Armenian families. We now know that the number of these protected Christians remained very limited (hundreds rather than thousands) until the late Eighteenth Century.¹³ This changed in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Between 1820 and 1880 the number of protected Christians, whose status as protégés of a European power was officially recognized by the Porte through the issuance of a diploma (*Berat*) grew explosively. This was the period in which each island in the Aegean was reported to have its own Russian honorary consul with its own circle of protégés.

The expansion of the protégé system continued until the Eighteen Eighties, by which time both the Ottoman Empire and the European states had embraced more modern ideas on citizenship and agreed that the protected Christians should opt either for full citizenship of the European protector state or for Ottoman nationality.

The protected status of the Christians at the precise time (Eighteen Thirties to Sixties) when trade expanded very rapidly, allowed an entrepreneurial middle class to develop. The increased wealth and self confidence of the Christian middle class in turn was reflected in the creation of an increasingly dense network of institutions – schools, but also gentlemen’s clubs, café’s, charitable organisations and (towards the end of the century) sports clubs, which allowed the expression of a distinct sociability of the non-Muslim communities.

By the Eighteen Sixties, the very visible increase in wealth and status of the Christian communities gave rise to a Muslim backlash. This expressed itself on a popular level in mob violence, of which the best-known example is the pogrom in Damascus in 1860. On an elite level the Muslim reaction took the form of the “Young Ottoman” movement. This was created by young and middle-ranking Ottoman bureaucrats in 1865. The central idea of the Young Ottomans (whose ideas otherwise show a great deal of variety and inconsistency) was that reforms should not be based on imitation of the West, but on a true and modern understanding of Islam, the premise being that Islam was a rational religion receptive to scientific innovation and that in its original form the Islamic community had been an embryonic democracy. The Young Ottomans advocated the introduction of constitutional, parliamentary rule, arguing that this would give all the different communities a stake in the well being of the empire and thus create a “Unity of the Elements” (*İttihadı Anasır*). But although a constitutional parliamentary regime was introduced in 1876, the Ottomanist ideology proved to have a very limited appeal. The new social space created by the non-Muslim minorities instead proved to be the ideal breeding ground for ethnic nationalism. When war broke out (again) between the empire and Russia in 1877, the loyalties of the Bulgarians, Greeks and Armenians proved dubious to say the least. The disastrous defeat in the war of 1877-78 discredited the idea of parliamentary constitutionalism in the eyes of most Muslims, including the monarch himself.

Faced with the onslaught of nationalism and liberalism, the Ottoman sultan who ruled the empire between 1876 and 1909, Abdülhamid II, reacted in much the same manner as did his contemporaries Francis-Joseph of Austria-Hungary and Alexander III of Russia. Over the heads of the middle class intelligentsia, in whose midst the constitutional movement had been born, he reached out to the mass of the population by projecting a fatherly image and by emphasizing the sacral nature of his rule. The Islamist and Pan-Islamist policies of Sultan Abdülhamid have been much studied, but they are interpreted in the context of the political and religious traditions of the Middle East and hence seen as a unique phenomenon. If we look at the East- and Central-European context, however, we notice that Francis-Joseph very definitely positioned himself both as a father figure and as a Catholic monarch, while the Russian Tsar strongly emphasized his role as champion of the Orthodoxy.

In employing these ideological tools, the Sultan was at a great disadvantage when compared to his European counterparts, however. Both the Austrian and the Russian monarch could effect a certain degree of bonding with the majority and the dominant groups in society. The vast majority of the Austro-Hungarian populations were Roman Catholic and this included the two titular ethnic groups (Germans and Hungarians). While imperial Russia included important minorities of different faiths (Catholic, Georgian and Armenian Christianity, Islam both Sunni and Shi’i), the religious element could be used to cement the bond between the

monarch and the vast majority of the population as well as with the sections of society, which dominated economic and political life. The situation in the Ottoman Empire was fundamentally different. The religious over determination of a division of labour between the fast-growing state bureaucracy (and army) on the one hand and the modern trade and industry sector on the other, which had occurred in the first half of the Nineteenth Century,¹⁴ meant that the sultan-caliph could not use religion as a cohesive force in his relation with those who dominated the modern sectors of the economy. The Christian population of the empire as a percentage of the whole had declined from about 40 percent early in the Nineteenth Century to about 20 percent in the early Twentieth Century, but that twenty percent – or rather the bourgeoisie from among those 20 percent – controlled the vast majority of the industrial sector and a similar percentage of international trade.

The Young Turks who carried out the constitutional revolution in July 1908 and deposed Sultan Abdülhamid nine months later presented themselves as the heirs to the constitutionalists of the Eighteen Sixties and Seventies. Ostensibly, they acted in name of the ideal of the “Unity of the Elements”. In reality, however, both the confidential statements of the revolutionaries before 1908 and their policies thereafter show that they had already become thoroughly disillusioned with this concept and that their real commitment lay elsewhere. It is debatable whether they were already in the grip of Turkish nationalism or inspired by a Muslim-Ottoman proto-nationalism, but it is absolutely clear that the Young Turks of the Committee of Union and Progress identified themselves with the interests of the state (which they served as soldiers and bureaucrats) and of the Muslim majority and that their perceived enemy was as much an “enemy within” as an “enemy without”.¹⁵

Almost immediately after the constitutional revolution of July 1908, the Committee of Union and Progress started to address the fundamental questions of money and men. On the money front, its possibilities were limited. Its main contribution, through the new finance minister Cavit Bey, who was the first Young Turk to enter the cabinet, was the drawing up of a realistic state budget. Cavit Bey produced a significant increase in the tax income, but also a more realistic and much higher level of expenditure, caused in part by the early retirement and paying off of large numbers of servants of the old regime. Attempts by the Committee to negotiate the abolition of the capitulations or the introduction of differential import tariffs (instead of the *ad valorem* ones) were rejected by all European powers, however.

Where manpower was concerned, the Young Turks took the obvious course of eliminating the existing regime of exemptions through new legislation. Discussions about this started soon after the constitutional revolution of 1908, but the legislation was enacted only after the suppression of the counterrevolution of April 1909. In July 1909 military service became obligatory for all male Ottoman subjects. In October, recruitment of conscripts irrespective of religion was ordered for the first time. At this time, the communal leaders of the various Christian communities were by and large still ready to cooperate with the Young Turk regime, even though it was already apparent that their vision of what Ottoman citizenship, the “Union of the Elements” (*İttihadi anasır*) differed fundamentally from the Young Turks’ vision of a unitary state. On the face of it, the Greek, Bulgarian, Syrian and Armenian community leaders agreed to universal conscription, but they added a number of conditions that ran directly counter to the intentions of the Young Turks, i.e. to use the army as a melting pot for the different ethnicities. They demanded that units be ethnically and religiously homogeneous, be officered by Christians and – in the case of the Bulgarians – be stationed only in the European provinces of the empire. There was very little enthusiasm for military service among the mass of the Christian population and many of those who could afford it (mostly children of the

bourgeoisie) opted to leave the country physically while the recruitment drive was on or to get a foreign passport.¹⁶

The outbreak of World War I finally gave the Young Turks the opportunity to surmount the constraints, which had been preventing the Ottomans from fully exploiting their available resources. On 2 August 1914 the Ottoman government announced that it was suspending payments on the national debt and on 1 October 1914 the age-old capitulations were unilaterally abolished. By this time, however, identity politics, aiming at the creation of, if not a Turkish, certainly an Ottoman-Muslim nation took precedence over economic and military rationality. In other words: of the two problems facing the Ottoman reformers that of national cohesion now completely overshadowed that of financial and human resources.

Economic and fiscal rationality would have implied expanding the existing and growing modern industrial and commercial sector, which was almost wholly owned by members of the Non-Muslim communities, and extracting the maximum surplus through effective taxation. This was no longer an option by 1914, however, after the trauma caused by the Balkan Wars, in which hundreds of thousand of Muslims, including a disproportionate percentage of the political and cultural elite, lost their ancestral homes. The “National Economy” (*Milli İktisat*) programme launched by the Young Turks in 1914 therefore was primarily the product of ethno-religious nationalism and served a political rather than an economic purpose. It aimed at replacing the Non-Muslim entrepreneurs with Muslim ones. 200.000 Greeks were expelled in 1914 even before the outbreak of war and life was made extremely hard for the remaining Christian entrepreneurs. While it is true that the “National Economy” programme laid the groundwork for the growth of a native Turkish entrepreneurial class, which came into its own in the republic, for the empire it meant a loss in commercial, technical and managerial skills and a fall in productivity.

Military rationality would have pointed to reducing the number of exemptions, calling up as many recruits as possible and using them effectively to increase the fighting strength of the army and navy. But here too, the logic of ethnic and religious antagonism prevailed. The Young Turks (not entirely without reason) doubted the loyalties of the Greek and Armenian communities and they were not prepared to run any risks with Greek and Armenian soldiers. This was shown in dramatic fashion when, after the failure – with great loss of life – of the Ottoman winter offensive against the Russians of December 1914-January 1915, the Armenian soldiers were disarmed and reassigned to labour battalions. Most of them were later killed.

The deportation of the Armenian population of Anatolia to the Syrian desert, which started in May 1915 and the wholesale killings which accompanied it, contradicted both economic and military rationality. In the countryside of Eastern Anatolia, it destroyed a very important part of the agricultural sector, thus ensuring that the Ottoman army would have to fight without local supplies of food and fodder and in the towns a major part of the industrial and commercial infrastructure was destroyed, affecting the productive capacity of the empire as a whole.

The ethnic policies of World War I started a process, which, together with the flight of the Greeks in 1922 and the population exchange executed under the aegis of the United Nations in 1924, rendered Anatolia far more homogeneous ethnically and religiously. These policies formed the basis for the creation of a successful national state, the Republic of Turkey, but they could not save the empire.

Conclusion

The reasons for the Ottoman Empire's ultimate failure to sustain its viability thus are manifold. It lacked the manpower, the money and the industrial base to compete successfully with European powers. The prerogatives of the European states under the system of Capitulations severely limited its room for manoeuvre in the economic sphere. The religiously over determined division of labour between a vastly increased state apparatus, dominated by Muslims and a modern industrial and commercial sector completely dominated by Christians under foreign protection meant that economic growth could hardly be tapped by the state to increase its resources. At the same time the explosive growth of the number of protected Christians and of their wealth created the social and cultural space in which separatist nationalisms could blossom. By the time the Ottoman elite tried to counter these with emotional appeals to a shared Ottoman citizenship and patriotism in the 1860s, it was already too late. Sultan Abdülhamid's emphasis on the Islamic character of the state during his rule in the 1880s and 1890s served to further alienate the non-Muslims. The Young Turk movement, which emerged in the 1890s and held power between 1908 and 1918, was born out of a Muslim reaction against the perceived failure of the sultan's regime to stop the weakening of the Ottoman state and the encroachments of foreigners and local Christians. When external circumstances gave them the opportunity to act independently, identity politics, or solving the ethnic issue, took priority over increasing the financial and human resources of the state.

¹ The expression "Eastern Question" entered diplomatic parlance at the time of the Congress of Verona in 1822. For a detailed survey of the problem see Matthew A. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923 A study in international relations*, London: Macmillan, 1972 (first edition 1966). For an excellent brief summary, see: Also Walter Alison Phillips' "Eastern Question, the" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago/London, 1962, Vol. 7, 861-868, based on the same author's contributions to the *Cambridge Modern History*.

² The most influential of these critics was Mahomet Zima Goal (1876-1924), often regarded as the "father of Turkish nationalism." See: Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish nationalism. The life and teachings of Ziya Gökalp*, London, 1950, 74 ff.

³ See: Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic reform in the Ottoman Empire. The Sublime Porte 1792-1922*, Princeton, 1980.

⁴ Stephanie Cronin makes this clear in her chapter on "Conscription and popular resistance in Iran (1925-1941)" in: Erik Jan Zürcher (ed.), *Arming the state. Military conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia 1775-1925*, London, 1999, 145-168. For further comparisons between the two countries, see: Touraj Atabaki and Erik Jan Zürcher (eds.), *Men of order. Authoritarian modernisation in Turkey and Iran*, London, 2003.

⁵ For these macro-economic trends, see: Şevket Pamuk,

⁶ Ahmed Emin [Yalman], *Turkey in the world war*, New Haven, 1930, 157.

⁷ Brian R. Mitchell, *International historical statistics. Europe 1750-1988*, New York/Stockton, 1992 (third edition).

⁸ Nicolaas W. Posthumus, *Goederenprijzen op de beurs van Amsterdam 1585-1914. Wisselkoersen te Amsterdam 1609-1914*, Leiden, 1943.

⁹ For a useful summary, based on recent research, of the problems involved in estimating the population, see: Donald Quataert, The age of reforms, 1812-1914, 777-798, in: Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert (ed.), *An economic and social history of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1914*, Cambridge: C.U.P, 1994. The main problem is uncertainty about the average size of the households. Adding one person per household adds 5.000.000 souls to the total.

¹⁰ Ahmed Emin, Op. Cit, 78-80.

¹¹ Maurice Larcher, *La guerre turque dans la guerre mondiale*, Paris, 1926, 589-90.

¹² Ahmed Emin, Op. Cit, 89.

¹³ See: Maurits H. van den Boogert, *Ottoman dragomans and European consuls. The protection system in Eighteenth-Century Aleppo*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Leiden University, 2002.

¹⁴ See Çağlar Keyder, *State and class in Turkey. A study in capitalist development*, London, 1987, 49-90.

¹⁵ Erik-Jan Zürcher, Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics 1908-1938, in Kemal H. Karpat (ed.), *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey*, Leiden, 2000, 150-179.

¹⁶ Erik-Jan Zürcher, The Ottoman conscription system in theory and practice, 1844-1918, *International Review of Social History* 43/3, 437-449. The information is based on British consular reports.