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IMPACT OF WORLD WAR I ON THE MUSLIM POPULATION OF SERBIA *

I. Dünya Savaşı'nın Sırbistan'daki Müslüman Nüfusa Etkisi

Gürsoy ŞAHİN**

Abstract: Relying on Ottoman archival documents, this article presents that during World War I the protection of the Muslim population in Serbia could be achieved only with the help of the mediator states who provided communication between the Ottoman Empire and Serbia. After the Ottoman Empire lost large portions of its lands in the Balkans, the protection of the Muslim population in the Balkans emerged as a new problem. The Istanbul Treaty of March 14, 1914 aimed to solve these problems, but the outbreak of WWI made the implementation difficult as the issues could only be discussed indirectly through mediator states.

Key Words: Ottoman Empire, Serbia, World War I, Balkan Wars, Italy, Muslims

Özet: Osmanlı arşiv belgelerine dayanarak hazırlanan bu makale Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Sırbistan'daki Müslüman nüfusun korunmasının Osmanlı Devleti ve Sırbistan arasında aracılık yapan devletler vasıtasıyla sağlanabildiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Osmanlı Devleti'nin Balkan Savaşları sonrasında Balkanlar'da bıraktığı topraklarında kalan Müslüman halkın haklarının korunması yeni bir mesele olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. 14 Mart 1914'te imzalanan İstanbul Anlaşması meseleye çözüm getirmeye çalışmış ancak Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın çıkması ve Osmanlı-Sırp diplomatik ilişkilerinin kesintiye uğraması ile anlaşmanın uygulanmasında sorunlar yaşanmıştır. Bu sorunlar ancak aracı devletlerin yardımları ile kısmen giderilebilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı Devleti, Sırbistan, I. Dünya Savaşı, Balkan Savaşları, İtalya, Müslümanlar

Introduction

Relations between the Ottoman Empire and Serbia date back to fourteenth century. After the Ottoman Empire took control of Serbia in the fifteenth century, direct Ottoman rule lasted until 1830.¹ From 1830 to the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Serbia functioned as an autonomous state within the Ottoman Empire.² Serbian independence in 1878, brought along new territories

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¹ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, Volume: 1*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 34, 53, 241; Frederick F. Anscombe, "The Balkan Revolutionary Age", *The Journal of Modern History*, Volume: 84, No. 3 (September 2012), p. 578; Miloš Luković, "Development of the Modern Serbian State and Abolishment of Ottoman Agrarian Relations in the 19th Century", *Český Lid*, Volume: 98, No. 3 (2011), p. 282; Mojmir Križan, "New Serbian Nationalism and the Third Balkan War", *Studies in East European Thought*, Volume: 46, No. 1/2, Nationalism and Social Science (June 1994), pp. 48-49.

² Maximilian Hartmuth, "De/constructing a 'Legacy in Stone': Of Interpretative and Historiographical Problems concerning the Ottoman Cultural Heritage in the Balkans", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume: 44, No. 5 (Sep., 2008), pp. 701-703; Hakan Demir, "Federalizm-Üniterizm İkileminde Sırp-Hırvat-Sloven Krallığı'nda Siyasal Yaşam (1918-1929)", *Balkan Araştırma Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Volume: 2/2, 2013, p. 92; Serap Toprak, "Osmanlı-Avrupa İlişkileri Çerçevesinde Sırbistan'ın Bağımsızlığı", *The Journal of International Social Research*, Volume:

including Nis, Pirot (Şehirköy) and Leskowitz (Leskofça).³ Thus, the country's land area increased from 37.840 square kilometers to 48.302 square kilometers.⁴

The Balkan Wars (1912-13) took Ottoman-Serbian relations into a different dimension.⁵ While the Ottoman Empire lost a large part of its Balkan territory, Serbia became a stakeholder in some of these territories.⁶ As a result of the Balkan Wars, the Ottoman Empire signed the Istanbul Treaty on March 14, 1914 in Istanbul in order to solve problems with Serbia.⁷ Border disputes were not mentioned in the agreement due simply to the fact that the Ottoman Empire did not share any border with Serbia. However, the protection of Muslims' rights living in Serbia became a major issue.

The Ottoman Empire declared its neutrality after signing an alliance treaty with Germany on August 2, 1914. The neutrality declared by the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the war was met positively by Serbia. Commentators noted, however, that siding with the Entente Powers rather with Germany would provide greater benefits to the Ottoman Empire.⁸ Likewise, as seen in a document dated July 29, 1914, Russia and Serbia declared their wish to continue a good relationship with the Ottoman Empire.⁹ To defuse tension caused by two German warships entering the Bosphorus, the Ottoman Empire announced that it had bought these ships. The Ottoman Empire backed away from its neutral position in the World War I thinking it would be beneficial to side with Germany.¹⁰ Thus, the Ottoman Empire entered the World War I as an opponent of Serbia.

Unfortunately, the academic writings on the political relations between the two states during World War I are extremely limited.¹¹ This paper seeks to contribute to the research in

6/24, 2013, p. 352; Ayşe Özkan, *Miloş'tan Milan'a Sırp Bağımsızlığı (1830-1878)*, IQ Kültür Sanat Publishing, İstanbul 2011, p. 322; Ayşe Özkan, *Bağımsızlıktan Sırp-Hırvat Sloven Krallığı'na Sırplar (1878-1918)*, IQ Kültür Sanat Publishing, İstanbul 2013; Selim Aslantaş, "Sırbistan: İsyanlar ve Bağımsız Devlet", *Balkanlar El Kitabı*, Volume: I, Edt. Osman Karatay-Bilgehan A. Gökdağ, Karam-Vadi Publishing, Ankara 2006, p. 482; A. Hajek, "Sırbistan", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Volume: 10, MEB Publishing, İstanbul 1980, p. 556-566; Halil Kurt-Mehmet Hacısalihoğlu, "Sırbistan", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Volume: 37, TDV Publishing, İstanbul 2009, p. 120-126.

³ Miroslav Svirčević, "The Establishment of Serbian Local Government in the Counties of Niş, Vranje, Toplica and Pirot Subsequent to the Serbo-Turkish Wars of 1876-1878", *Balkanica*, 2006 (37), p. 111; Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, Twentieth Century, Volume: 2*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 29; H. Kurt-M. Hacısalihoğlu, *ibid*, p. 123.

⁴ A. Özkan, *Miloş'tan Milan'a ...*, p. 322-326.

⁵ William W. Hagen, "The Balkans' Lethal Nationalisms", *Foreign Affairs*, Volume: 78, No. 4 (July-August 1999), pp. 57-58.

⁶ Feyza Kurnaz Şahin, "Balkan Wars and Turkey in The Annual Reports of English Embassy", *South-East European Diplomacy. 100 Years Since Balkan Wars*, Edt. İonuţ Cojocaru-Abidin Temizer, Editura Cetatea De Scaun Publishing, Târgovişte 2014, p. 130-152.

⁷ *Düstur*, Tertip 2, Volume: 7, 25 Zilhicce 1332-5 Muharrem 1334, 1 Teşrinisani 1330-31 Teşrinievvel 1331, Matbaa-i Amire, Dersaadet 1336, p. 62; Feyza Kurnaz Şahin, "Balkan Savaşı Sonrasında Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kaybettiği Topraklardaki Müslümanları Korumaya Yönelik Hukuki Düzenlemeler", *Balkanlar'da Osmanlı Mirası ve Defter-i Hâkânî*, Volume: 1, Edt. Abidin Temizer-Uğur Özcan, Libra Publishing, İstanbul 2015, p. 144.

⁸ BOA (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives), Hariciye Nezareti Siyasi Kalemi (HR.SYS.), File Nr: 2402/Folder Nr: 1, August 10, 1914.

⁹ BOA, HR.SYS., 2402/16, July 29, 1914.

¹⁰ Molly Greene, "The Ottoman Experience", *Daedalus*, Volume: 134, No. 2, On Imperialism (Spring, 2005), p. 89; Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Dünya Tarihinde Balkanlar*, Trans. Ali Cevat Akkoyunlu, Doğan Kitap Publishing, İstanbul 2009, p. 104; Fahir Armaoğlu, *20.Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi 1914-1990*, Volume: I, 1914-1980, Türkiye İş Bankası Publishing, Ankara 1994, p. 100, 103-105; Rifat Uçarol, *Siyasi Tarih (1789-2010)*, Eighth Edition, Der Publishing, İstanbul 2010, p. 396-397.

¹¹ Mehmet Sait Dilek, "Sırp-Hırvat-Sloven Krallığı (Yugoslavya) ile Diplomatik İlişkilerin Kurulması ve Kral Alexander Karadjordjevic Gözüyle Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ve Türkiye", *Journal of Atatürk*, Volume: 4/2, 2004, p. 267-278; Ayşe Özkan, "I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Sırbistan'ın Müslümanlara Karşı Tutumu", *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, Volume: 7/14, 2014, p. 49-70; Тонка Жупанчић, Посланство Краљевине Југославије у Турској – Цариград, Анкара 1919-1945. (1890-1945), (Tonka Zupancic, The Mission of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Turkey - Constantinople, Ankara 1919-1945. (1890-1945)), Архив, 2, Београд, VII, 2004, (<http://www.arhivyu.gov.rs/active/sr->

this field as well as to examine Ottoman-Serbian relations during the World War I (1914-1918), an extremely important period in the history of Serbia as well as the other Balkan nations.

The Determination of the Mediator States in the Ongoing Relations

The Istanbul Agreement, which aimed to regulate Ottoman–Serbian relations after the Balkan Wars, was not implemented because the two states entered World War I as opponents.¹² For this reason, the Ottoman Empire tried to protect the rights of Muslim people like Bosnians and Albanians living in Serbia using every possible diplomatic tool. Indeed, the diplomatic relations between the two countries ended officially on November 1, 1914. On this development, Mr. Cevad (Ezine), the Ottoman Ambassador to Belgrade, and Dr. Jakov Nenadovic, the Serbian Ambassador in Istanbul, returned to their respective countries.¹³ In fact, before official relations between the two states were interrupted, diplomatic relations with Serbia became very difficult. For example, according to a document dated September 8, 1914, the Ottomans sought a meeting with Serbian representatives but it could not be realized due to the state of war in Serbia.¹⁴

When the Ottomans and Serbs could not meet, mediator states became involved to protect the rights of citizens in both countries. The formal cessation of diplomatic relations between the two countries led mediator states to step forward. It was extremely important to protect the lives and rights of the civilians during the war in terms of inter-state relations. The first mediation attempt in this regard came from Italy. In fact, Russia left the protection of the Russian citizens living in the Ottoman Empire to Italy. Italy requested approval by declaring the situation to the Ottoman authorities on September 4, 1914, and it made an offer to the Ottoman Empire. The Italian authorities stated that they were ready to protect the interests of Ottoman citizens in Russia and in Serbia if required. On this, the Ottoman government stated that they would be grateful if Italy would protect the interests of Ottoman citizens in Serbia and that they were delighted to receive such an offer.¹⁵ Thus, the Italian embassy took upon itself the task of protecting the rights of the Muslims in Serbia during the war.¹⁶

On the other hand, it was accepted that the interests of Serbian, British, and French citizens would be protected by the American embassy. A day after the cessation of official relations between the Ottomans and Serbia, on November 2, 1914, the US embassy reported to the Ottoman government that they were assigned to protect the interests of Serbian citizens according to the provision of international law regarding the “protection of the enemy citizen’s rights” due to the fact that the agreement was signed before the war and the other concessions remained invalid. The Ottoman government found the US embassy suitable to protect the interests of the mentioned states and citizens.¹⁷

Later on, Italy prioritized its interests on the Adriatic coast and agreed to join the Entente Powers on April 26, 1915 in London. Within a month Italy broke its neutrality and declared war against Austria-Hungary on May 20, 1915. As Italy joined the war, its mission to protect the Ottoman citizens in Serbia ended. Then the Ottoman government contacted the Bulgarian

cyrillic/home/glavna_navigacija/izdanja/casopis_arhiv_v01/dosadasnji_brojevi/casopis_arhiv_godina_5_brojevi_1_i_2/casopis_arhiv_godina_5_br_2.html [16.12.2015].

¹² BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Emniyet-i Umumiye Evrak Odası Kalemî, (DH.EUM.VRK.), 15/11, 17 Şaban 1333 (June 30, 1915).

¹³ M.S. Dilek, *ibid*, p. 267.

¹⁴ BOA, Hariciye Nezareti Hukuk Müşavirliği İstişâre Odası (HR.HMŞ.İŞO.), 209/9, 17 Şevval 1332 (September 8, 1914).

¹⁵ BOA, HR.SYS., 2167/2, September 4, 1914; BOA, HR.SYS., 2406/63, January 17, 1915; BOA, HR.SYS., 2167/26, November 15, 1914.

¹⁶ BOA, HR.HMŞ.İŞO., 209/14, 15 Rebiülevvel 1333 (January 31, 1915).

¹⁷ BOA, HR.SYS., 2167/13, 2 November 1914; BOA, HR.SYS., 2167/17, November 4, 1914.

government for mediation.¹⁸ Once Bulgaria declared war against Serbia on October 14, 1915, the issue of the Muslims' protection became highly problematic.¹⁹

Despite the Italian involvement in the war against the Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman government requested Italy to continue its mission to protect the Muslim population's rights in Serbia. As a result of these attempts, the Italian ambassador in Nis on May 27, 1915, in line with the request of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry, continued its mediation activities with the Serbian state in order to protect the rights of the Muslim community in Serbia. As seen from the documents, the Ottoman Empire was pleased with the work made in the region by the Italian embassy. As a result of the Italian Embassy's efforts, the Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić promised to treat the Muslim population well in the future. The Italian embassy reported this to the Ottoman Empire. Thereupon, the Ottoman government thanked the embassy for its efforts in Nis.²⁰ However, the question was whether this promise was fulfilled by the Serbian government. When the United States joined the war on April 2, 1917, the Ottoman citizens' protection in Serbia was officially left to the Swedish embassy²¹ but the US embassy's involvement in the mediation continued.²²

Diplomatic Tension during the First Months of the War: "Mutual Attacks against the Embassies"

It is understood that there were diplomatic tensions between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire immediately after the cessation of formal relations. Even before the Ottoman Empire entered the war, the Serbian side attacked the Ottoman embassy in Nis and the consulate in Skopje and captured official documents.²³ The Ottoman consulate in Skopje reported to the Foreign Ministry on November 3, 1914 that before the cessation of diplomatic relations with Serbia, Serbs attacked the Ottoman consulate under the guise of inspection and arrested the officers of the consulate and took them to the police station. Later their clothes and homes were confiscated. The Serbs withheld the documents found in the consulate, only later were they returned. The report stated that the documents would be returned but the Serbs also mentioned the possibility of confiscating some of these documents.²⁴

As retaliation, the Ottoman Empire invaded the Serbian embassy in Istanbul. The Ottoman police sealed the rooms of the Serbian ambassador's official residence on November 8, 1914 and a military sergeant was assigned to control entry and exit. The American ambassador, who was in charge of protecting Serbian interests in the Ottoman Empire, protested the action with a verbal note on November 16, 1914.²⁵

The United States protested that there were political documents in the official residence and that embassies could not be touched even during war. Thus, with these actions the Ottoman Empire violated international law.²⁶ Ottoman officials countered that according to the reciprocity principle applied during wars they had the right to control the Serbian embassy.²⁷ Moreover, the Ottoman Empire cited the Serbian attacks on the consulate in Skopje and the embassy in Nis and asserted the principle that "If a state does not comply with the interstate

¹⁸ BOA, HR.SYS., 2168/28, August 22, 1915.

¹⁹ Hikmet Öksüz-Mehmet Okur, "Birinci Dünya Savaşında Balkanlar", *Balkanlar El Kitabı*, Volume: I, Edt. Osman Karatay-Bilgehan A. Gökdağ, Karam-Vadi Publishing, Ankara 2006, p. 625.

²⁰ BOA, HR.SYS., 2409/74, May 27, 1915.

²¹ BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Şifre Kalemi (DH.ŞFR.), 76/243, 6 Şaban 1335 (May 28, 1917).

²² BOA, HR.SYS., 2169/32, February 1, 1918.

²³ BOA, HR.SYS., 2167/18, November 8, 1914.

²⁴ BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdüriyeti 5. Şube (DH.EUM.5.Şb.), 3/47, 27 Zilhicce 1332 (November 16, 1914).

²⁵ Is a term used for the unsigned proposals given by the embassies. Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, "Takrir-i Şifahi", *Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri*, Volume: 3, MEB Publishing, İstanbul 1983, p. 385.

²⁶ BOA, DH.EUM.5.Şb., 3/47, 27 Zilhicce 1332 (November 16, 1914).

²⁷ BOA, HR.SYS., 2167/18, November 8, 1914.

law, a right may arise for the others to disobey also” and therefore their actions should not be considered contrary to the law. Also, it was stated that taking useful machines such as a wireless telegraph machine from the Serbian Embassy, which was necessary for the defence of the state, should not be considered abnormal. The Ottoman Empire was cautious about this issue. First, an investigation was started about whether or not the embassy and the consulate were separate locations and whether or not the seized documents were political in nature and the results were scheduled to be reported to the American Embassy.²⁸

Subsequently on November 24, 1914, Ottoman administrators addressed the US embassy. It was reported that seizing certain documents while inspecting the Serbian consulate in Beyoglu just at the beginning of the war was retaliation for the confiscation of documents belonging to the Ottoman consulate in Skopje. It was expressed in the written reply to the US embassy that if the documents, which were taken from the consulate in Skopje were returned to the Ottomans, the Ottoman police would return the seized Serbian documents.²⁹

It is clear from Ottoman documents that the repercussions of this problem continued throughout the war; both the US and the Swedish embassies followed up on this issue. The problem arose again at the end of the war. Indeed, on February 1, 1918 the Swedish and American embassies took initiatives to put their hands on the documents of the Serbian consulate. They sealed the rooms where the documents of the consulate were kept, asserting that some fresh air needed to be let into the rooms, pointing out that the Serbian embassy did not open the room where the documents were kept.³⁰ The same issue arose again on October 3, 1918. The pretext of cleaning and ventilating the room was probably the result of a suspicion that the documents may have been tampered with, allowing the intermediaries to check whether they were in place or not.

Ottoman administrators had cleaned the rooms of the Serbian consulate in Beyoglu from time to time, but it was reported to the American and Swedish embassies that the documents were untouched. The Ottoman Empire requested information through the help of the Swedish Embassy in Istanbul about the state of the consulate in Skopje. According to the information obtained, the Ottoman consulate was still closed. Considering this information, the Ottoman Empire stated that the documents and the buildings belonging to the Ottoman consulate in Skopje needed to be cleaned and ventilated too.³¹ However, they failed to provide precise information about how to solve this issue over which both sides struggled for a long time.

Oppression of Muslims and Its Impact on the Ottoman-Serbian Relations

One of the major issues affecting the relations between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire during World War I was the oppression of Muslims in Serbia. These problems included censorship applied by the Serbian state to the letters of the Muslim populations, the confiscation of their properties, forced labours, and forced military enlistment. Moreover, they included the animals and vehicles of the Muslim population by the soldiers, exacting money from the Muslims, and Muslims being treated coldly by administrative and military officers. Furthermore, for no reason, some of them were imprisoned, exiled, oppressed, and even killed by military forces.³²

In the first months of World War I, Serbia took extraordinary measures which were implemented throughout the entire nation. In August 1914, all the letters reaching the post offices went through censorship. In fact, its aim was to prevent the Serbian public from becoming aware of news that would hurt morale. The Serbian government decided to punish the

²⁸ BOA, DH.EUM.5.Şb., 3/47, 27 Zilhicce 1332 (November 16, 1914).

²⁹ BOA, HR.SYS., 2167/33, November 24, 1914.

³⁰ BOA, HR.SYS., 2169/32, February 1, 1918.

³¹ BOA, DH.EUM.5.Şb., 70/32, 27 Zilhicce 1336 (October 3, 1918).

³² A. Özkan, "I. Dünya Savaşı'nda...", p. 54-57.

writers of letters with such content. This was the reason for the arrest and imprisonment of many Muslims. When Muslims suffered from this censorship being applied to their letters, the Ottoman embassy acted. At the beginning of his mission on August 18, 1914, the Ottoman ambassador to Serbia, Mr. Cevad (Ezine), requested certain necessary measures be implemented in a report he sent to the Ottoman government.³³

Immediately after Serbia's entry into the war, various hardships were imposed on the Muslim population, which were reflected in the documents from October 19, 1914.³⁴ One of the problems encountered in this sense was the matter of the Muslims' military enlistment. According to the Istanbul Treaty, Muslims were exempted from the military service. However, due to the attack of some Bulgarian gangs that included Muslim, Serbia sent the Muslim population to military service or used them for grunt work, which was a violation of the agreement. In their turn, the Muslims living in this area opposed the implementation in a more pronounced way, especially after jihad was declared by the Ottoman Empire. The Muslim community gathered and evaluated this issue and stated that this decision by the Serbian government would not be accepted. As a result of Muslim protest, the Serbian government gave up enlisting Muslim soldiers.³⁵

Another problem faced by the Muslims was the grunt work given to the Muslim population by the Serbian government in November-December 1914. In this regard, on January 10, 1915 some information was requested from the Italian Embassy in Nis. In these documents, it was stated that procedures contrary to the agreement and to the human rights were performed, the Muslims were taken to military service through violence, their animals which were the source of their livelihood were confiscated, and these implementations caused serious disturbances.³⁶

Another issue which was on the agenda between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire during this period was the matter of extraditing Muslim soldier fugitives to Serbia. According to a document dated September 8, 1915, the Serbian soldiers of Bulgarian and Muslim background fled from Serbia to Greece but they were extradited to Serbia by trains. Thereupon, the Ottoman government asked the Greek Foreign Ministry not to extradite the fugitive Muslim soldiers to Serbia.³⁷

Problems Related to Properties and Land

Another problem faced by the Muslims living in Serbia during this period was the issue of property and land confiscation. The aforementioned Istanbul Treaty stated that the Muslims had the right to choose their nationality within three years, those who changed nationality and emigrated were both exempted from custom duties and had the right to protect their properties and control them through a third party.³⁸

Before the Istanbul Treaty was signed, the Serbian government had passed a law called "Regulatory about the Settlement Right of the Entities in the Annexation Area" (the Regulation and Colonization of the Agrarian Reform).³⁹ According to this law, the ownership and settlement of abandoned lands and unused state lands were made easier. The second article of this law stated that the abandoned lands and the lands without owners were owned by the state and that these lands would be inhabited by the population. The lands that were defined as "abandoned" were lands where no agricultural activities had taken place within the past year,

³³ BOA, HR.SYS., 2402/24, August 18, 1914; A. Özkan, "I. Dünya Savaşı'nda...", p. 42.

³⁴ BOA, HR.SYS., 2403/74, October, 19, 1914.

³⁵ A. Özkan, "I. Dünya Savaşı'nda...", p. 56, 58-59.

³⁶ BOA, HR.HMŞ.İŞO., 209/13, 23 Safer 1333 (January 10, 1915).

³⁷ BOA, HR.SYS., 2413/11, September 8, 1915.

³⁸ BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Mebânî-i Emîriye ve Hapishaneler Müdüriyeti Müteferrik (DH.MB.HPS.M.), 13/30, 7 Recep 1332 (June 1, 1914).

³⁹ A. Özkan, "I. Dünya Savaşı'nda...", p. 62.

and were thus left uncultivated.⁴⁰ The Serbian government signed the Istanbul Treaty while it was making plans for the implementation of this regulation. It seemed that despite the treaty, Serbia aimed to implement the regulation. Thereupon, the Ottoman administration argued against the land regulation made by Serbia just before the agreement and warned its citizens.

The Ottoman Empire requested that the Italian Embassy in Nis protect the rights of the Muslims living in Serbia. The Italian Embassy contacted Serbian authorities to protect the lands belonging to Ottoman citizens who had migrated or remained in Serbia. Italy asked for the cancellation of the 2nd Article of the law so that Serbia would not consider these uncultivated lands as abandoned.⁴¹ The persistent efforts of the Ottoman Empire and the Italian ambassador in Nis were successful. The 2nd Article of the law, which would have entered into force on May 26, 1914, was replaced by the Serbian government on May 9, 1914 as a result of the responses relevant to this issue. So, the regulations about the abandoned lands were deemed to be invalid.⁴²

But again, the Ottoman Empire took precautions to secure its citizens' rights in Serbia. On May 19, 1914 the Ottoman Interior Ministry cautioned that Serbian confiscation of lands left by the Balkan emigrants was still a possibility should they remain uncultivated for a year. The ministry cautioned that citizens of the Ottoman Empire with lands in Serbia should take precautions.⁴³

At the later stages of the World War I, Serbia acted again under the pretext of "Confiscating the goods and properties belonging to the citizens of the enemy state". It was reported that Serbia would pass a law confiscating and goods of the enemy countries. On January 10, 1915 Serbia took another step on this issue.⁴⁴ The Serbian government announced through newspaper advertisements that Muslims had to present a certificate of the ownership of all land, real estate, and other properties by April 10, 1915, otherwise such rights would not be recognized. This step would result in the Serbian confiscation of lands owned by Muslim migrants who had left to Ottoman-controlled territories. Upon this, the Ottoman administration warned the Muslims who emigrated from Serbia and owned properties in the mentioned area and encouraged them to object to this Serbian decision through petitions.⁴⁵ The Ottoman Empire issued the names of those suffering damages and showed the amount of the damages.⁴⁶ The warnings on this subject were repeated frequently.⁴⁷

On these developments, some of the immigrants who spread across Turkey claimed the protection of their lands in the areas mentioned by filing petitions. For example, Mehmed Muammer Efendi, who was a police sergeant in Urfa, gave a petition to the lieutenant governor to be forwarded to the Interior Ministry. In his petition, Mehmed Muammer Efendi requested the protection of his household land situated in Kosovo in the town of Prizrin, which was occupied by Serbia and reported that he had the ownership certificate of this land by referring to

⁴⁰ BOA, DH.MB.HPS.M., 13/11, 23 Cemaziyelahir 1332 (May 19, 1914); A. Özkan, "I. Dünya Savaşı'nda...", p. 62.

⁴¹ BOA, HR.SYS., 2409/74, May 27, 1915.

⁴² A. Özkan, "I. Dünya Savaşı'nda...", p. 63.

⁴³ BOA, DH.MB.HPS.M., 13/11, 23 Cemaziyelahir 1332 (May 19, 1914).

⁴⁴ BOA, HR.HMŞ.İŞO., 209/12, 23 Safer 1333 (January 10, 1915).

⁴⁵ BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti İdare-i Umumiye Kalemi Ekleri (DH.İ.UM.EK.), 92/29, 21 Cemaziyelevvel 1333 (April 6, 1915); BOA, DH.UMVM., 123/86, 4 Şaban 1333 (June 17, 1915); BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Mebani-i Emiriye ve Hapishaneler Müdüriyeti (DH.MB.HPS.), 154/50, 4 Şaban 1333 (June 17, 1915).

⁴⁶ BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Emniyet-i Umumiye Levazım Kalemi (DH.EUM.LVZ.), 28/11-A, 2 Cemaziyelevvel 1333 (March 18, 1915); BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdüriyeti Mektubi Kalemi (DH.EUM.MTK.), 72/4, 2 Cemaziyelevvel 1333 (March 18, 1915); BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Hukuk Müşavirliği (DH.HMŞ.), 27/53, 29 Rebiülahir 1333 (March 16, 1915); BOA, DH.İ.UM.EK., 92/55, 10 Cemaziyelahir 1333 (April 25, 1915).

⁴⁷ BOA, DH.MB.HPS., 154/51, 4 Şaban 1333 (June 17, 1915); BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Umûr-ı Mahalliye-i Vilâyât Müdüriyeti (DH.UMVM.), 123/85, 4 Şaban 1333 (June 17, 1915).

the cases specified in the advertisement section of the *Tasfir-i Ekfar* newspaper dated March 25, 1915.⁴⁸

Consequently, the Serbian government decided to comply with the property rights of the Muslims who had become Ottoman citizens.⁴⁹ However, it emphasized again the importance of not leaving the lands uncultivated. For example, in a communique reported by the Foreign Ministry on September 1, 1915, the citizens who left Serbia but owned lands in the abandoned area were reminded to rent their lands through a trustee in order not to lose their right of ownership and that agricultural activities should have continued on the lands.⁵⁰ There are many examples of repeating the same warnings.⁵¹

Another problem faced by the Muslims who stayed in the area after the Balkan Wars and during the years of the World War I was the issue of the citizenship. Essentially, the nationality issue of the Muslims who stayed in Serbia was set according to the Istanbul Treaty. But that agreement was terminated due to the outbreak of the World War I. For this reason, it was difficult to reach a solution concerning the nationality issue during the war years. Instructions in accordance with the terms of the agreement were published in order to solve this issue.⁵²

Conclusion

The most sensitive period of the relations between the Ottoman Empire and Serbia was undoubtedly the years of the Balkan Wars and World War I. A number of problems were experienced in the relationship because the two states fought as opponents during the War. There were two key issues creating tensions in the diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Serbia during the war. The first of these was the attack of the embassies while the second was related to the rights of the Muslims who either emigrated or stayed in Serbian territory.

In this sense, the embassy's attack was one of the most important examples of retaliation by both states during the war. The attack on the Serbian Embassy in Istanbul was carried out by the Ottoman Empire in response to the seizure of documents that resulted from the Serbian attack on the Ottoman embassy and consulate in Nis and Skopje. The issue was resolved through the intervention of the mediator states; with such assistance, the parties did not create a major crisis.

When it came to the issue of protecting the rights of the Muslims, Serbia was reluctant and used the war as an excuse to confiscate the land, property, and the animals of the Muslims and force the Muslim population to enter military service, contrary to the Istanbul Treaty. The Ottoman Empire made the necessary attempts in order to protect the rights of the Muslims and from time to time it achieved positive results. It is noteworthy that in both issues, Serbia sidestepped problems by citing World War I as a reason and chose to solve them in accordance with its own wishes. However, it should also be noted that these kinds of problems are not inevitable due to the state of war. Overall it appeared that the mediator states' steps produced more positive results despite obstacles.

⁴⁸ BOA, DH.İ.UM.EK., 92/46, 5 Cemaziyelahir 1333 (April 20, 1915).

⁴⁹ BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti İdare-i Umumiye Kalemi (DH.İ.UM.), 25/2-04, 21 Şevval 1333 (September 1, 1915); A. Özkan, "I. Dünya Savaşı'nda...", p. 64.

⁵⁰ BOA, DH.İ.UM.EK., 10/2, 21 Şevval 1333 (September 1, 1915).

⁵¹ BOA, DH.İ.UM., 25/2-04, 21 Şevval 1333 (September 1, 1915); BOA, DH.İ.UM.EK., 94/63, 21 Şevval 1333 (September 1, 1915); BOA, DH.İ.UM.EK., 92/30, 22 Cemaziyevvel 1333 (April 7, 1915).

⁵² BOA, Dâhiliye Nezareti Sicill-i Nüfus Tahrirat Kalemi (DH.SN.THR.), 69/41, 22 Şaban 1334 (June 24, 1916); BOA, DH.ŞFR., 82/181, 11 Rebiülevvel 1336 (December 25, 1917); BOA, DH.UMVM., 123/106, 17 Şaban 1333 (June 30, 1915); BOA, DH.EUM.VRK., 15/11, 17 Şaban 1333 (June 30, 1915); BOA, DH.MB.HPS., 154/81, 17 Şaban 1333 (June 30, 1915); BOA, DH.SN.THR., 67/72, 16 Cemaziyevvel 1334 (March 21, 1916); BOA, DH.SN.THR. 64/79, 20 Zilkade 1333 (September 29, 1915); İbrahim Serbestoğlu, *Osmanlı Kimdir? Osmanlı Devleti'nde Tabiiyet Sorunu*, Yeditepe Publishing, İstanbul 2014, p. 352.

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