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Mehmet Hacısalihoglu

## Inclusion and Exclusion: Conscription in the Ottoman Empire<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

In Europe the decades after the French Revolution witnessed the emergence of national armies. The watchwords of the Revolutionary Wars such as «defence of the fatherland» and «military-nation» evolved as founding principles of the modern nation state's military organisation. Furthermore, the army was regarded as a «school of the fatherland», as an important means of creating a nation of citizens.<sup>2</sup> The British General Sir Ian Hamilton for example described in 1910 universal military service as «the greatest engine the world has yet seen for the manufacture of a particular type of human intellect and body».<sup>3</sup> Already by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, internal unity of a nation was seen as one of the most important preconditions for achieving and maintaining the status of a great European power, and in this respect the «civilising» mission of the army was accorded great importance. The successes of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies between 1792 and 1815 and of the German and Italian armies between 1859 and 1871 were celebrated as achievements of the nation in arms.

These European developments also came to shape the history of the Ottoman Empire in its final phase. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Ottoman Empire was, compared to the British Empire, Tsarist Russia and the Habsburg Monarchy, more acutely threatened by the prospect of dissolution. The multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire faced the double challenge of standing up against militarily superior enemies such as Russia and of suppressing movements of national independence and upheavals on its own territory. Both factors were essential for the Ottoman reform movement in the «long» 19<sup>th</sup> century. In its struggle for survival the empire availed itself of the techniques of the European nation states and thus became a «nationalising» empire in the same way as the other continental empires.

1 The author thanks Metin Ünver for his help in assembling the material for this article, and Sonja Levsen and David Krumwiede who translated this chapter from German into English.

2 E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Moderni-*

*zation of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, 1976), 298; A. G. Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation. Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (New York, 2004), 68–69.

3 Quoted in Altınay, *Myth*, 62.

Since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the concept of an Ottoman nation had been evolving. Ottomanism was the ideology of the constitutional movements of both the Young Ottomans (ca. 1865–1871) and the Young Turks (1889–1918). In the Young Turk revolution in 1908 the idea reached its climax and became the dominating ideology in the last decade of Ottoman history. The first modernising reforms under European influence affected the Ottoman army. In Ottoman discourses around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, conscription had been interpreted primarily as a means of strengthening the army. In the course of the following decades its importance as a «civilising» agency received increasing attention. After several attempts, conscription was finally introduced in 1909. In the years of intensive war experiences, starting with the Balkan Wars 1912–13 and especially during the First World War, which finally brought about the break-up of the empire, the Ottoman army became an army of the «Ottoman Nation».<sup>4</sup>

Against this background, this chapter deals with the introduction of conscription, focusing on the political and social motives behind this process and on the implications of the empire's multi-ethnic structure. Four phases in the debates about conscription will be discerned: the first phase from 1839–1855/6, the second from 1856–1908, and a third one from the introduction of universal conscription in 1909 to the break-up of the empire in 1918. It will be discussed in which ways and to what extent the model of the «nation in arms» became an integrating and stabilizing factor for the Ottoman Empire, and why this model finally failed in the First World War.

## 2. The Beginnings of the Debate on Universal Conscription Prior to 1839

The first and most comprehensive modernising reforms in the Ottoman Empire were directed at the army.<sup>5</sup> Before the abolition of the *Janissaries* (i.e. the central army) in 1826, several attempts at reforming the Ottoman military system had been made, e.g. the *Nizam-ı Cedid* (i.e. New Order) regiments of Selim III (1789–1807). But these attempts, which met with the opposition of the Janissaries, often resulted in the murder of reform-oriented Sultans. The most important step in this context was the abolition of the Janissaries in 1826. Because of their failures in putting

4 For the introduction of universal conscription in the Ottoman Empire see primarily: U. Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni* [The Adventure of Conscription of the Ottoman Non-Muslims] (Istanbul, 2000); T. Heinzelmann, *Heiliger Kampf oder Landesverteidigung? Die Diskussion um die Einführung der allgemeinen Militärflicht im Osmanischen Reich 1826–1856* (Frankfurt/Main, 2004); E. J. Zürcher, «The Ottoman Conscription System, 1844–1914», *International Review of Social History* 43 (1998), 437–449, 446; see also idem, ed., *Arming the State: Military Conscription in the*

*Middle East and Central Asia, 1775–1925* (London–New York, 1999), 79–94; M. Hacısalıhoğlu, «Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Zorunlu Askerlik Sistemine Geçiş: Ordu-Millet Düşüncesi» [Introduction of Universal Conscription in the Ottoman Empire: the Idea of Military-Nation], *Toplumsal Tarih* 164 (August 2007), 58–64.

5 E. Z. Karal, *Selim III'ün Hatt-ı Hümayunları. Nizam-ı Cedid 1789–1807* [Imperial Decrees by Selim III. The New Order 1789–1807] (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1946, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Ankara, 1988), 29–31.

down the Greek uprising in 1821, the Janissaries, who had offered armed resistance against the governmental reforms, became discredited in the population and were disbanded before the end of the uprising by the reform-oriented Sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839). He then founded a new, modernised army under the name «*Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediye*» (Victorious Soldiers of Muhammed). In contrast to the Janissaries, most of whom had been supporters of the *Bektashi* order (i.e. an Islamic non-Orthodox and mystical order), the new army adopted, as its name indicates, Sunnite Islam as its official ideology. Paid imams were hired for the religious education of the soldiers.<sup>6</sup> This shows that the Ottoman army was still seen as a Muslim army.

But drafting enough soldiers proved to be highly difficult, and thus the government often resorted to the forced recruitment of young men. In 1831 the first modern population census was carried out in the empire's regions under central government.<sup>7</sup> On this basis the total number of draftees could be allotted to the districts (*kaza*) according to the strength of their population.<sup>8</sup> But in the first great war against Russia (1828–9) the army proved to be inferior and suffered military defeats. Even the governor of Egypt, Mehmed Ali Paşa, who had been able to build up a modern army with French help, led several successful campaigns against the armies of the central government during his uprising in the 1830s. Another severe problem of the Ottoman army was the high number of casualties: according to official numbers published in 1837, 45,496 of the 161,036 soldiers who had been recruited in the past ten years had died from illnesses in times of peace. The number of deserters was given as 20,117. The total number of losses in times of war and peace was 106,366, which means that only about 44 per cent of soldiers had remained in the army. Only ten per cent of recruits were able to return to their families after this period.<sup>9</sup>

The first serious attempt to draw Christians into the army was made in 1835, when the need for more soldiers led to the Ottoman government's decision to recruit Christian subjects for the navy. 1,098 Christian soldiers, mainly Armenians, were introduced into the navy, and in 1837 further 1,491 Christian sailors, now primarily Greeks, were recruited. Yet this measure caused considerable negative reactions from the Christian communities, who subsequently tried to minimise the number of recruits from their own parishes. Many Greeks from Rhodos and Chios fled to the neighboring smaller islands.<sup>10</sup> The first important debate about recruiting non-Muslims for the army began in 1839 during the Egyptian Crisis by

6 Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 52.

7 R. H. Davison, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Reform, 1856–1876* [Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876], translated into Turkish by O. Akinhay, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Istanbul, 2005), 431–432; E. Z. Karal, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda İlk Nüfus Sayımı 1821*

[The First Census in the Ottoman Empire 1831] (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Ankara 1997).

8 Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 88–89.

9 *Ibid.*, 91–93.

10 See Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 29–33.

which Memed Ali Paşa, supported by France, proved to challenge the Ottoman Empire's structure. The Prussian military adviser Helmuth von Moltke and Great Admiral Hafiz Mehmed Paşa considered drafting Armenians into the land forces. However, Moltke was opposed to the idea of general conscription, which would have comprised other Christian communities and Jews. He speculated that the Armenians, who were held to be industrious and rich, would serve their country more loyally than the Muslim Kurds or the Arabs. He considered it impossible to realise the idea of a general conscription because of Great Admiral Hafiz Mehmed Paşa's fear of offending the religious dignity of the conservative Muslims.<sup>11</sup>

The following motives, preconditions and problems of introducing conscription in the Ottoman Empire prior to 1839 can be discerned: the need for a modern, effective army, capable of countering internal and external threats, the systematic assessment of the empire's population by means of statistical records, the recruitment of non-Muslims from the Balkans and from Anatolia, who had so far been excluded from military service, and the recruitment of Muslims from the Kurdish and Arab provinces, who had until then enjoyed a large degree of autonomy against the background of their traditional tribal structures.

### 3. 1839–1856: Debates on the Introduction of Universal Conscription

In 1839 Sultan Abdülmecid (1839–1861) promulgated the «Imperial Edict of Gülhane», which came to be called the «Beneficial Realignment» (*Tanzimat-ı Hayriye*),<sup>12</sup> and was regarded as a first step towards a constitution.<sup>13</sup> This reform charter guaranteed the life, honour and property of all Ottoman subjects and declared that no one could be imprisoned without a court decision, that all subjects would be taxed according to their property and that the burden of military service would be divided in a fair way. Military service was regarded as a duty of the population for the «defence of the country» (*muhafaza-i vatan*).<sup>14</sup> This marked the beginning of the debate on equality before the law of all subjects and on universal conscription in the Ottoman Empire.

11 Helmuth von Moltke, *Briefe über Zustände und Begebenheiten in der Türkei*, 374–375, Letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> April 1839, quoted in Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 286.

12 For the text of the edict see Engelhardt, *Tanzimat ve Türkiye* [Tanzimat and Turkey], transl. into Turkish by A. Reşad (Istanbul, 1999), 497–500; R. Kaynar, *Mustafa Reşit Paşa ve Tanzimat* [Mustafa Reşit Paşa and Tanzimat] (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Ankara, 1991), 176–180.

13 B. Tanör, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Anayasal Gelişmeler* [Constitutional Developments in the Ottoman Empire] (Istanbul, 1991), 53.

14 Engelhardt, *Tanzimat*, 498; Gülsoy, *Gayrimüs-*

*limlerinin*, 35. The term *vatan* was in this period still a mixture of the Islamic tradition and the modern term «fatherland». It was only in the following decades that the term was used by part of the governing elites in the sense of the modern term «Fatherland», see T. Heinzelmann, «Die Konstruktion eines osmanischen Patriotismus und die Entwicklung des Begriffs *Vatan* in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts», in *Aspects of the Political Language in Turkey (19th-20th centuries)*, ed. by H.-L. Kieser (Istanbul, 2002), 41–51; B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London, 1961), 329.

In 1843 a five-year term of military service was established with a *ferman* (i. e. decree), and the drafting of recruits through the drawing of lots (*kur'a*) was introduced. This marked the shift towards an individual duty of military service. The drawing of lots theoretically included both the Muslim and non-Muslim parts of the empire's population, excluding only the regions with special status. This procedure was confirmed by the 1846 recruitment law which remained in effect until 1870. The law stated that all Muslims were personally liable to serve in the army.<sup>15</sup> In practice, however, several exceptions to this rule existed, which were not specified in the law. Thus, the inhabitants of Istanbul and *Bilad-i Selase* (i. e. the three districts of Galata, Üsküdar and Eyüb) were exempt from military service, as were the students of religious schools. Furthermore, those who could not serve personally for various reasons could name a personal replacement (*bedel*), although the possibility to buy exemption from service had not been mentioned in the law of 1846.<sup>16</sup>

An important step towards universal conscription was the decision of the Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükela*) in 1847 to recruit non-Muslims for the land forces. It was argued that the number of eligible Muslims did not meet the requirements of the army and that furthermore the number of Muslim subjects in the empire was shrinking because of compulsory military service. According to this position, the number of Christians enjoying the same privileges as the Muslims and living within the Ottoman Empire was rising. Hence they should join the Muslims in the service of the «Sublime Sultanate».<sup>17</sup> This decision was endorsed by religious and legal references in a *fatwa* (i. e. comment) by the *Sheikh ul-Islam* (i. e. the superior religious authority of the Ottoman Empire). The fact that the number of Muslims was shrinking during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for instance on the Balkans, is indeed confirmed by several sources. The population registry of the district Hasköy (today Haskovo in Bulgaria) from 1840 for example shows that the Christian families in the region comprised on average one to two persons more than the Muslim families.<sup>18</sup> Apart from other political and socio-economic reasons military service did play an important role in this process, especially if one takes the high number of casualties in times of peace and especially during the long wars against Russia into consideration. Furthermore, military service was an important reason for the increasing poverty of the Muslims and their shrinking number.<sup>19</sup>

15 M. Çadırcı, «Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Kura Usulüne Geçilmesi <1846 Tarihli Askerlik Kanunu>» [Towards the Recruitment-Lot in the Ottoman Empire: The Recruitment Law of 1846], *Askeri Tarih Bülteni* 18 (1985), 59–75.

16 Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 198–200.

17 Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 47; Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 290–292.

18 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA – Ottoman Central Archive), ML.CRD, Nr. 626. The same tendency can be seen in other Ottoman sources,

such as the Governments' Almanachs, see *Salname Edirne 1290* [1873], 156–157: in the whole Sancak (administration unit) Filibe (today: Plovdiv) the Christian households had about two members more than the Muslim households; see N. Ersoy, *XIX. Yüzyılda Filibe Şehri (1839–1876)* [The City of Philippopol in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1839–1876)], as yet unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Istanbul University, 2003), 56–58.

19 Engelhardt, *Tanzimat*, 448.

For the implementation of the plan to recruit non-Muslims into the land forces, a thorough preparation was considered necessary in order to avoid the problems that had already evolved in the context of drafting Christians into the navy. The question of recruiting Christians for the land forces was assigned to the Councillors' Chamber of the Ministry of War (*Dar-ı Şura-yı Askeri*).<sup>20</sup> Among the problems arising from the extension of compulsory service to non-Muslims was the particular question of worship. In 1847 Christian sailors demanded their own priests and chapels on warships, a claim that was refused by the government on the basis of the Sharia. Although the Great Admiral Halil Rıfat Paşa, the Great Vizier Mustafa Reşid Paşa and the Sultan Abdülmecid were in favour of church services on board of the warships, the Sheikh ul-Islam Arif Hikmet Efendi declared that church service on board of warships was equivalent to the construction of new churches and thus could not be allowed on the basis of religious law.<sup>21</sup>

In 1851 new attempts to recruit Christians provoked negative reactions among the Christian communities. In many districts the drawing of the lots could not be carried out. Many Christians fled into other regions or even left the country. Christian parishes claimed that their economic conditions were extremely bad and that the fields could not be fitted if the young men were drafted into the army. The government tried to win the support of church officials by inviting them to the deliberations of the Council of Ministers. When resistance continued, it was decided that Christians in the districts opposing military service should not be recruited through a drawing of lots, but by the implementation of a reglement (*tertip*) until they would accept military service.<sup>22</sup> In addition, it was considered to introduce a tax exemption for non-Muslim recruits from the *cizye* (i.e. poll tax), a tax that traditionally had to be paid by Christians and Jews.

The implementation of the new recruitment law not only led to difficulties among the Christian population, but also in the Arab provinces. In 1846, for example, the Field Marshall of the Army of Arabistan (i.e. Arabia), Namık Mehmed Paşa, was asked to carry out a census in Aleppo, in order to provide a basis for the draft of recruits. He was, however, supposed to conceal this measure from the population, because of fears of active resistance.<sup>23</sup> As in the Arab provinces, tribal chiefs and local notables had an important position in the Kurdish and Albanian provinces, and the draft of recruits was supposed to be implemented in accordance with them. Thus it was noted in 1848 in the minutes of the Councillors' Chamber of the War Ministry, that «among the new recruits which have arrived, there is not a single son of a notable», even though the introduction of the drawing of lots had been supposed to eliminate the differences between rich and poor.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore,

20 Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 47–48.

21 *Ibid.*, 42–45.

22 *Ibid.*, 50–53.

23 Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 252, 255.

24 *Ibid.*, 226, 232 and 237.

the Ottoman central government also was concerned about the quality of recruits from the Arab provinces. When in 1847 the draft of Arab indigenous recruits from Tripolis was discussed, it was considered unrealistic by Namık Mehmed Paşa, because he questioned the loyalty of the Arabs.<sup>25</sup>

In sum, the period between 1839 and 1856 can be considered to be the first phase of intensified discussions about the introduction of universal conscription. In 1848, Great Vizier Mustafa Reşid Paşa described the situation to the Sultan as follows: The Ottoman Empire was comprised of 28–29 million inhabitants. About half of them were Christians and large parts of the Muslims were members of «uncivilised tribes» (*kabail ve aşair-i vahşiye*). This left only about three to five million Muslims from which recruits could be drawn. It is obvious from this contemporary description that the introduction of universal service was regarded as a practical necessity around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mustafa Reşid Paşa even pointed out that the reduction of the number of Muslim subjects would finally challenge the Muslims' status as a «ruling religious community» (*millet-i hakime*) within the empire.<sup>26</sup> According to this view, universal conscription was supposed to secure the Muslims' position as dominating religious group of the Ottoman Empire.

#### 4. The Crimean War and the Reform Edict (*Islahat Fermanı*) of 1856: «Equal Rights and Equal Duties»

The Crimean War between 1854 and 1856 complicated the implementation of the Ottoman military reforms of 1846. Because of the increased need for soldiers, the government frequently had to resort to the earlier practices of drafting recruits. The fact that during the Crimean War the Western powers England and France fought on the side of the Ottoman Empire against Russia, induced the Ottoman government to eliminate the existing inequalities between Muslims and non-Muslims and to ameliorate the position of the non-Muslims.<sup>27</sup> The inequalities between Muslims and non-Muslims had after all been a cause for the frequent intervention of the Western powers in the empire's internal affairs. The new emphasis on legal equality between the different religious groups was also a concession of the Ottoman Empire with regard to French and British support and the recognition of the empire as a European power, whose territorial integrity was guaranteed by the Western powers in the Treaty of Paris in 1856.

On 14 May 1855 it was decided to abolish the *cizye* (poll tax) and to introduce compulsory service for all non-Muslims. The official decree stated that the defence of the empire had so far been left to the Muslims, although it had to be the task of all subjects. Military service was defined to be the most important duty of Ottoman

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 257–258.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>27</sup> Davison, *Reform*, 53–55.



subjects, and everyone without exception was regarded liable to fulfill this duty. However, those who for various reasons were not able to serve personally could still send a replacement (*bedel*). Non-Muslims would stop to pay the *cizye* tax, but, if exempted from military service, had to pay an exemption tax (*hisse-i askeriye*). In addition, non-Muslims were allowed to be promoted to officers' ranks.<sup>28</sup> Following this decision, the government tried to draft Christian recruits in several regions, meeting intensive resistance particularly among Christian Orthodox communities on the Balkans. Many fled into the mountains or to neighboring countries. Fearing the economic consequences of a mass flight of tens of thousands of subjects, recruitment was stopped and the number of recruits to be drafted reduced from ten to seven thousand.<sup>29</sup>

The reform edict of 1856 (*Islahat Fermanı*), which was added to the Peace Treaty of Paris, was the so far most important step towards eliminating the inequalities between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects.<sup>30</sup> Although the edict was in large parts the product of the political rapprochement between the Ottoman Empire and the Western powers, it formed at the same time the basis for the empire's later attempts to transform its subjects into equal citizens with the same rights and duties. Although compulsory military service of non-Muslims was justified by the principle of «equal rights, equal duties», the possibility of evading service through «sending a replacement or payment of a certain sum of money» was still included into the edict.<sup>31</sup>

Universal military service was thus legally introduced in 1855–56, but not put into practice immediately. The continuing difficulties to implement conscription had several reasons: An important part of the Ottoman ruling class was not prepared to accept a multi-religious army. When the Great Vizier of the Tanzimat reforms, Mustafa Reşid Paşa, sent a memorandum to the Sultan, he explained his concerns with the argument that introducing complete equality would abandon the traditional order of Ottoman society, which rested on the principle of dominant Muslim religious communities and non-Muslim religious communities being ruled.<sup>32</sup> As a matter of fact, the edict provoked unrest among the Muslim population of Eastern Anatolia and Syria.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the last decades had

28 Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 55–59; idem, «Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlikten Muâfiyet Vergisi: Bedel-i Askeri (1855–1909)» [The Military Replacement-Tax for Ottoman Non-Muslims: Bedel-i Askeri (1855–1909)], *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi* 37 (2002), 93–118.

29 Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 59–60.

30 For the text of the edict see Engelhardt, *Tanzimat*, 501–507.

31 Ibid., 505; Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 325.

32 Ibid., 330–332.

33 Davison, *Reform*, 58–61; Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 329.

On the hostile position of Muslims see G. Bozkurt, *Alman-İngiliz Belgelerinin ve Siyasi Gelişmelerin Işığında Gayrimüslim Osmanlı Vatandaşlarının Hukuki Durumu (1839–1914)* [The Legal Status of non-Muslim Ottoman Citizens in the Light of German and English Documents and Political Developments] (Ankara, 1989), 60–62; B. Masters, «The 1850 Events in Aleppo: An Aftershock of Syria's Incorporation into the Capitalist World System», *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22/1 (February 1990), 3–20.

shown the negative attitude of the non-Muslims towards military service, and the government was not yet prepared to force them into the army only because of the principle of legal equality. Recent research by Tobias Heinzelmann has shown that the non-Muslims usually preferred paying additional taxes to serving in the army. At the same time one has to take into account that the source material to substantiate this claim is still very restricted.<sup>34</sup> Davison stresses the point that only few of the non-Muslim members of the Ottoman Parliament in 1877–78 were in favour of compulsory service for non-Muslims.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the army was not structurally prepared for the reforms. It was debated how to practically integrate non-Muslim recruits into the army – whether they should form separate units or serve in multi-religious units, if the setting up of multi-religious units would cause conflicts etc. The first experiences with these innovations were rather negative. At least the recruitment of non-Muslims for the navy continued to be carried out. In addition, non-Muslims were recruited as workers for army factories.<sup>36</sup>

On the basis of a further decree issued on 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1856 and directed at the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian and the Catholic Patriarch<sup>37</sup> and the Chief Rabbi, the conditions of the exemption tax were determined. The tax had to be paid by the whole non-Muslim population, even in places like Istanbul and *Bilad-i Selase* (i.e. the three districts in Istanbul), where the Muslims continued to be exempted from military service.<sup>38</sup> By the end of 1856 the exemption tax – first called *iane-i askeriye* (i.e. military contribution/exemption tax) and later *bedel-i askeri* (i.e. military compensation) – was officially introduced. Heinzelmann discusses the thesis that compulsory service was a construct aimed at legitimising the *iane-i askeriye* as a renamed *cizye* (i.e. poll tax). He comes to the conclusion that «the extension of military service to the non-Muslim population was not from the outset devised as a construct to legitimise the *iane-i askeriye* as a renamed *cizye*». <sup>39</sup> Yet, as a matter of fact, the exemption tax did substitute the *cizye*, which was, as Zürcher has stressed, the second largest tax source of the Ottoman Empire, and it was preferred by the government.<sup>40</sup> In this context, the way in which the tax was defined in the decree of July 1856 is remarkable, too: According to the ferman, 180 men (Muslims or non-Muslims) had to send one recruit.<sup>41</sup> The exemption tax for a Muslim was fixed

34 Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 333. For the hostile attitude of the clergy see Bozkurt, *Belgelerinin*, 62–71. For the negative reaction of the non-Muslims see also Davison, *Reform*, 99–100.

35 Ibid., 100; H. T. Us, *Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi 1293/1877* [Parliamentary Papers 1877] (Istanbul, 1939), 322–326, 330–331; Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 112–115.

36 I want to thank M. Erdem Kabadayı for his permission to see a chapter of his Ph.D. thesis in preparation on *Labour Enforcement as a Field of Interaction*.

37 These are mainly Catholic Armenians. See K. Beydilli, *Recognition of the Armenian Catholic Community and the Church in the Reign of Mahmud II (1830)* (Cambridge/Mass., 1995).

38 Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 334. In Istanbul and *Bilad-i selase* the exemption tax was later not collected, following the principle of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims; see Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 86.

39 Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 336–337.

40 Zürcher, «Theory and Practice», 88–89.

41 Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 73; A. Şener, *Tanzimat*

at 80 Lira (8000 Kuruş), which he had to pay by himself and in cash. For a non-Muslim, in contrast, the tax was set at 50 Lira (5000 Kuruş), i.e. 30 Lira less, and this sum was divided among 180 men. The per capita tax was thus about 28 Kuruş.<sup>42</sup> The average yearly per capita sum of the exemption tax corresponded largely to the sum of the *cizye* paid by a person in the middle tax category (*evsat*).<sup>43</sup> It is thus clear that the government intended to make exemption for Muslims more difficult, for non-Muslims easier. For the latter group practically nothing changed except the name of the tax. Its sum remained largely the same as before. For the state finances little changed either: the sum of the exemption tax, which was supposed to be collected in 1855/56, was 62,500,000 Kuruş and thus largely congruent with the sum of the annual *cizye* tax. As Gülsoy remarks convincingly, the government apparently wanted to fill the gap in the budget which had been caused by the elimination of the *cizye* by way of the exemption tax.<sup>44</sup>

In 1865 another commission started a debate on the recruitment of non-Muslims into the army. The supporters stressed the same arguments as before and reasoned, when dominating the commission, that the number of eligible Muslims did not meet the needs of the army, that the Muslim population shrank drastically and that therefore one had to recruit non-Muslims. The Great Vizier Ali Paşa belonged to the supporters of military service of non-Muslims.<sup>45</sup> The well-known historian and statesman Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, who returned to Istanbul after having successfully implemented reforms in Bosnia,<sup>46</sup> explained his concerns regarding a multi-religious army to the commission. Following his account, the Ottoman soldiers so far had been motivated by the Islamic concepts of a «Holy War» (*cihâd*) and of sacrifice (*şehâdet*). In moments of crisis the most effective words of the commandant used to be «Oh holy war, oh sacrifice! Come on, comrades, for the true religion!» (*yâ gazâ, yâ şehâdet, haydi din-i mübîn uğruna çocuklar*). It was not possible, however, to motivate Christians and Jews with the concept of «cihâd». How could an officer incite a religiously mixed army to deeds of bravery? Neither was it possible to motivate them with the parole «For your fatherland» (*vatan uğruna*) because they equated «vatan» with their village squares. Even if one substituted patriotic zeal for religious zeal and even if this developed the same force as in European nation states, it would still not equal the force of religious zeal. Furthermore, such changes would take a very long time and «until then our forces

*Dönemi Osmanlı Vergi Sistemi* [The Ottoman Tax System in the Era of Tanzimat] (Istanbul, 1990), 117–118.

<sup>42</sup> Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 334.

<sup>43</sup> The *cizye* tax had been paid in three categories: Following a ferman by Mahmud II from 1834 a rich man (*alâ*) had to pay 60 Kuruş, a person of middle income (*evsat*) 30 Kuruş and the poor (*edna*) had to pay 15 Kuruş. See E. Z. Karal,

*Osmanlı Tarihi* [Ottoman History], vol. V: *Nizam-ı Cedid ve Tanzimat Devirleri (1789–1856)* [The Era of Nizam-ı Cedid and Tanzimat] (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1947, 5<sup>th</sup> edn. 1988), 176.

<sup>44</sup> Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 88.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 103–104.

<sup>46</sup> Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Ma'rûzât* [Thoughts], ed. by Y. Halaçoğlu (Istanbul, 1980), 80–110.

will be without spirit».<sup>47</sup> Hence, he suggested to bring the Muslim population in Eastern Anatolia and in the Taurus, which was so far dominated by tribal structures, under control of the government and to recruit soldiers in these regions. In this context he suggested the recruitment of non-Muslims in the long term as well.<sup>48</sup>

Ahmed Cevdet Paşa's argument demonstrates the difficulties of applying the military concepts of a nation state to a multi-ethnic empire with different regional administrative traditions. Even if the government was prepared to substitute «fatherland» for «Holy War», this would not yet imply the subjects' willingness to accept and internalise this new concept. Ahmed Cevdet Paşa furthermore pointed out that Christian officers commanding Muslim soldiers would be a serious problem: «Would the simple soldier Hasan in a difficult moment obey captain Hristo, who will be leading him into death?» He stressed that Christian soldiers would have to be allowed to be promoted to higher ranks, because otherwise the Western powers would intervene in favour of the Christians. In addition, he argued that non-Muslim soldiers were not as capable of enduring hardship as the Muslims. The needs of non-Muslim soldiers would have to be completely satisfied, they would have to be paid in time, and «still we would be targeted for criticism by the Western powers.»<sup>49</sup>

The recruitment laws of 1870 and 1886 did not change the system.<sup>50</sup> Compulsory service was restricted to Muslims, and the law did not mention the recruitment of non-Muslims. Heinzelmann has come to the conclusion that equality of Muslims and non-Muslims was never a real aim.<sup>51</sup> However, in the 1860s and 1870s the opposition movement of the «Young Ottomans» appeared, which demanded the introduction of a constitution. Following the idea of Ottomanism, all Ottoman subjects should form a nation of equal state citizens based on the principle of equal rights and equal duties. Here the European concepts of conscription armies and state citizenship served as a model. One of the most important repre-

47 Ahmed Cevdet quotes his speech from 1865 in his *Ma'rûzât* (Memorandum), in which he presented the recent history of the empire and which he submitted to Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1880, see Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Ma'rûzât*, 114.

48 Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir* [Biographies], 21–39, vol. III, ed. by C. Baysun (Ankara, 1963), 106–107. He explained for example, that «the Government of the Sublime Porte has never entered the Kozan mountains.» Hence in 1880 an army was formed under the name *fırka-yı ıslahiye* (reform division). Ahmed Cevdet Paşa participated in the expedition against the tribal chiefs of this region. For a detailed description of this expedition see idem, *Tezâkir*, 107–136.

49 Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Ma'rûzât*, 114–115.

50 The first article of the recruitment law of 1870 stated: «All of the Muslim population of the Well-

protected domains of His Majesty are personally obliged to fulfill the military service which is incumbent on them», see E. J. Zürcher, «Conscription System», 446.

51 Heinzelmann, *Kampf*, 347; E. J. Zürcher, «Conscription System», 446. Even though universal conscription remained a fiction, the inequality between Muslims and non-Muslims was gradually eliminated after the reform edict of 1856. In the years 1862, 1863 and 1865 the Greek Orthodox Church, the Armenian Church and the Jewish communities were re-organised. They had their own meetings, so that the lay members of the respective parishes had the possibility to participate in the administration of their parish. This contributed significantly to the modernisation of the non-Muslim parts of the population. Davison, *Reform*, 119–141.

sentatives of this movement, Namık Kemal, wrote that, while the Muslims served their fatherland with both their money and their life, non-Muslims did so only by giving money.<sup>52</sup> This criticism was directed both against the non-Muslim communities, which objected to the introduction of universal service, and against the government, that contented itself with the exemption tax. The Young Ottomans also criticised the Muslims who regarded military service of non-Muslims as a potential danger for the state. The non-Muslims, the former argued, would never unite to destroy the empire because they were too deeply divided into various sects and confessions. It is interesting to note in this context that the Young Ottomans referred to the experiences of the Great Powers as examples: France recruited Algerians, England the Irish and Indians, Russia recruited Krim Tatars, Poles, Georgians, Daghestans and Circassians and formed a powerful army. The Ottoman government was to take the methods and regulations of these countries as an example and thus to recruit non-Muslims.<sup>53</sup>

### 5. The Era Abdülhamid II (1876–1909): The Hamidian-Islamic Army

After assuming power in 1876, Abdülhamid II introduced a constitutional government. Drafted by Midhat Paşa, the constitution regarded every person as a subject with the same obligations and duties. A parliament was opened, but the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war in 1877 served as a pretext for closing it down again. By removing all liberal statesmen from the capital, the Sultan sought to strengthen his autocratic reign which lasted until the revolution of the Young Turks.

According to Engelhardt, during the time of the Russo-Turkish war the Ottoman state was able to summon an army of 800,000 men. Yet compared to its European counterparts with regard to geographical size and population, this army was relatively small. Engelhardt ascribes this to the fact that defending the country was still primarily considered to be a Muslim task which did not involve non-Muslim subjects.<sup>54</sup> Abdülhamid made crucial decisions in order to modernise and reform the army. In particular, he invited German Generals, especially von der Goltz Paşa, who initiated radical changes in weaponry and military education.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, he focused on the integration of Muslim tribes in Anatolia and the Arab provinces. Abdülhamid's policies were intended to tighten his rule among the Muslim tribes of Albania, Kurdistan and in the Arab provinces. They can be interpreted as a centralist Islamist policy and as a form of protonationalism.<sup>56</sup> In 1891 he formed to

52 Bozkurt, *Belgelerinin*, 123.

53 For the articles of the Young Ottoman paper *Hürriyet* from the years 1868/69 see Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 104–106.

54 Engelhardt, *Tanzimat*, 448.

55 J. L. Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe. Die preußisch-deutschen Militärmissionen in der Türkei 1835–1919* (Düsseldorf, 1976); M. Çadırcı,

«II. Abdülhamit Döneminde Osmanlı Ordusu» [The Ottoman Army in the Era of Abdülhamid II], *Dördüncü Askeri Tarih Semineri, Bildiriler* (Ankara, 1989), 36–47.

56 N. R. Keddie, «Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism», *Journal of Modern History* 41 (1969), 3–26; E. D. Akarlı, «Abdülhamid II's Attempts to Integrate Arabs into the Ottoman System», in *Palestine* →

this end irregular cavalry regiments based on Kurdish, Turkmenian and Arab tribes (*Hamidiye Süvari Alayları*).<sup>57</sup> In the following year, he founded a special military school for tribes (*Mekteb-i Aşiret or Aşiret Mektebi*)<sup>58</sup> which was devised to train the sons of Kurdish and Arab tribal leaders to become officers in the Hamidiye cavalry regiments. The tribal leaders who were willing to contribute to the formation of the Hamidiye regiments were invited to Istanbul in 1891. Furthermore, he sent presents to Kurdish and Arab elders. He skillfully utilised his caliphate title by sending copies of the Koran to tribal elders in the province of Erzurum.<sup>59</sup> However, Abdülhamid's integration strategies turned out to be only partly successful. His most inveterate enemies were to be found among the Arab tribes in the Hidjaz region, including the holy sites of Mekka and Medina.<sup>60</sup> The construction work on the «holy railway» which was supposed to connect Damaskus with Mekka was impeded by protesting Arab tribes in the region and finally had to be abandoned in Medina altogether.<sup>61</sup>

In the Hamidian era the military exemption tax was increased twice for non-Muslims.<sup>62</sup> After 1856, a small number of non-Muslims was granted access to military schools, and the graduating officers were later deployed in the Ottoman police forces.<sup>63</sup> After the 1870s, non-Muslims were called upon to form volunteer units in wartime and join the Ottoman army. The Ottoman government promised

in the *Late Ottoman Period*, ed. by D. Kushner (Leiden, 1986), 74–89; C. Eraslan, *II. Abdülhamid ve İslâm Birliği* [Abdülhamid II and Islamic Union] (Istanbul, 1992); S. Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domain: Ideology and Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire: 1876–1909* (London, 1997). For repercussions of Pan-Islamic policies outside the empire see A. Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain 1877–1924* (New York, 1997).

57 B. Kodaman, «Hamidiye Hafif Süvari Alayları (II. Abdülhamid ve Doğu-Anadolu Aşiretleri)» [The Cavalry Regiments of Hamid (Abdülhamid II and the East-Anatolian Tribes)], *Istanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi* 32 (1979), 427–480.

58 E. L. Rogan, «Aşiret Mektebi: Abdülhamid II's School for Tribes (1892–1907)», *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1996), 83–107; A. Akpınar and E. L. Rogan, *Aşiret, Mektep, Devlet. Osmanlı Devletinde Aşiret Mektebi* [Tribe, School, State. Tribal Schools in the Ottoman Empire] (Istanbul, 2001).

59 H.-L. Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede. Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei 1839–1938* (Zürich, 2000), 146. Kieser also stresses the role of the Hamidiye-regiments in controlling the Armenians of Eastern Anatolia., *ibid.*, 147–149.

60 Fikret Adanır even argues that Abdülhamid's

employment of the caliphate as a tool weakened Ottoman rule in the region. The state's authority was undermined since Arabs were not ready to accept a Turk in the role of the caliph, see Adanır's unpublished paper «Zum Verhältnis von Kalifat und Sultanat im Osmanischen Reich», Workshop on Multi-Ethnic Empires in the long Nineteenth Century, Hamburg, January 2007.

61 M. Özyüksel, *Hicaz Demiryolu* [The Hijaz Railway] (Istanbul, 2000), 182–210.

62 Military exemption tax amounted to 5000 Kuruş and had to be paid, until 1895, by 180 persons. In the following year the same amount had to be paid by 135 persons (approx. 37 Kuruş per capita). In 1903 the same amount had to be mustered by 100 persons (approx. 50 Kuruş per capita). This shows that exemption tax was increased in the course of time. It is important to take into account that depending on district and governors the practice of levying taxes differed significantly. The amount of the actual tax imposed did not depend on an average ratio but on the individual financial status of the persons concerned and most likely on categories such as those fundamental to *cizye* tax. The practical implementation of both taxing and the varying categories of its collection still await further historiographical scrutiny. Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 75–76.

63 *Ibid.*, 110–112, 115–121.

reforms in eastern Anatolian provinces with Armenian population and for the Balkans after the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. In the 1890s and at the turn of the century, Ottoman police forces in these regions started to recruit non-Muslims.

## 6. The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the Introduction of the General Conscription (1909)

Ottomanism was the founding ideology of the Young Turks' movement, which entered the political scene with the establishment of the «Committee of Union and Progress» in 1889. According to Ottomanism, there existed a common history of all Ottomans who were to form an Ottoman unity (*ittihad-ı Osmani* or *ittihad-ı anasır*) and a common future. «Ottoman nation» became a key-concept of the time.<sup>64</sup> After the successful conclusion of the Young Turks' Revolution in July 1908, the «hero of the revolution» Enver Bey proclaimed in a speech in Salonica: «Aujourd'hui, l'arbitraire est [d]isparu, le mauvais gouvernement n'existe plus. Nous sommes tous frères: il n'y a plus des bulgares, des grecs, des serbes, des roumains, des juifs, des musulmans; sous le même horizon bleu, nous sommes tous égaux, nous nous glorifions d'être des Ottomans». He concluded his speech with the proclamation: «Vive la Nation Ottomane!»<sup>65</sup>

General conscription formed the centerpiece of the Young Turks' political agenda. Article 8 of the program of the committee of union and progress dated 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1908, emphasised that all Ottoman citizens were equal, regardless of their race and religion. Consequently, they also obtained the same rights and duties. According to their abilities and faculties they were to assume tasks in the administration of the state, and in this context all non-Muslim citizens were obliged to do military service. Even the former revolutionary organisations of Macedonia demanded general conscription in their negotiations with the committee of union and progress.<sup>66</sup> According to the constitution, which was re-introduced on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1908, military service was defined to be an obligation for all citizens.<sup>67</sup> The empire's

64 For the idea of Ottomanism see M. Arai, «An Imagined Nation: The Idea of the Ottoman Nation as a Key to Modern Ottoman History», *Oriens* 27 (1991), 1–11; M. Hacısalıhoğlu, *Die Jungtürken und die Mazedonische Frage (1890–1918)* (Munich, 2003), 83–87, 320–335.

65 «Discours d'Enver Bey», in: Centralen Dāržaven Istoričeski Arhiv [Central Historical State Archive] (Sofia), Fond 331, Op. I, a.e. 234, fol. 135–136.

66 Account of the Bulgarian commercial agent from Salonica, Nr. 733, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1908, Centralen Dāržaven Istoričeski Arhiv, Fond 331, Op. I, a.e. 233, fol. 89–91 r-v. The letter of the right-wing group of the Inner Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation addressed to the Committee's headquarter in Salonica was published on 5<sup>th</sup> August

1908 in the newspaper *Ilinden*, C. Biljarski, «Vätreshnata Makedono-Odrinska Revoljucionna Organizacija, Sājuzāt na Bālgarskite Konstitucionni Klubove i Narodnata Federativna Partija (Bālgarskata Sekcija) sled Mladoturskata Revoljucija» [Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organisation, the Association of Bulgarian Constitutional Clubs and the Federal People's Party (Bulgarian Section) after the Young Turks' Revolution], *Izvestija na Dāržavnite Arhivi* 56 (1988), 117–189, 130.

67 For the Constitution see S. Kili and A. Ş. Gözübüyük, *Türk Anayasa Metinleri. Sened-i İttifaktan Günümüze* [Texts of Turkish Constitutions. From Sened-i ittifak to the Present] (Ankara, 1985), 32–33.

constitutional government sought to amalgamate all groups into one single nation. For the first time in Ottoman history the concept of a «nation in arms» came into effect. In the Ottoman parliament a commission devised a memorandum regarding the introduction of general military service. The exemption of non-Muslims from service was considered an inexcusable mistake. It also criticised the exemption of the Istanbul Muslim population from conscription. According to the commission, it was now time to remove the mistakes from the past which seemed to restrict the formation of an Ottoman nation. Henceforth all non-Muslim citizens (*vatandaş*) would fight on the side of their fellow Muslim citizens for defending the future and status of the Ottoman existence and for preserving the fatherland.<sup>68</sup> In the same memorandum the «civilising» meaning of general conscription was emphasised: The administration's aim was to accomplish a new unity between the different ethnic groups within the Ottoman Empire. Military service was deemed an adequate means to accomplish this aim.<sup>69</sup>

In June 1909 parliament discussed the abolishment of military exemption tax and the introduction of general conscription of all non-Muslims.<sup>70</sup> Almost all non-Muslim members of parliament endorsed the idea of non-Muslims serving in the army whilst criticising the possibility to be exempted from service by paying tax. Serving in the army was considered essential to achieving the Ottoman unity (*ittihad-ı Osmani*). The Bulgarian member of parliament Pančo Dorev (*Monastir*) gave an account of assemblies composed of groups of non-Muslims who were willing to do military service. To his mind «Ottoman Unity» was to be achieved through military service.<sup>71</sup> The privilege to sacrifice oneself in battle was regarded as a great honor which had until then been denied to non-Muslims. The well-known Greek member from Serfice (*Servia*), Georgios Busios, rejected the proposal of a Turkish member that non-Muslims should be trusted with menial tasks like construction work instead of military service. For him, non-Muslims were equally capable of defending the country.<sup>72</sup> The Armenian member from Erzurum, Ohannes Varteks, declared that «no Ottoman has the right to be exempted from military service and rise and sleep under the blanket provided by those who sacrifice

68 Ahz-ı Asker Kanunu Esbab-ı Mucibe Mazbatası, Esbab-ı Mucibe Layihası [Report on the Recruitment Law, Memorandum], *Meclisi Mebusan, Birinci Devre, 1325–1326. İctimai, Meclisi Mebusan Levayih ve Tekalifi Kanuniye ve Encümen Mazbataları* [The Chamber of Deputies. First Period. The Assembly of 1325–1326. The Chamber of Deputies, Memoranda, Draft Bills and Commission Reports] (Ankara, 1982), 230–231.

69 Ahz-ı Asker Kanunu Esbab-ı Mucibe Mazbatası, Esbab-ı Mucibe Layihası, *Meclisi Mebusan*, 231–232.

70 The government of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa submitted a legislative proposal, according to which mi-

litary exemption tax would be abolished for non-Muslims under the age of 22. Non-Muslims above that age would continue to pay exemption tax. Parliamentary session of 13<sup>th</sup> June 1325 (1909), *Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi, Devre I, İctima Senesi 1* [Parliamentary Papers, First Period, First Year of the Assembly], vol. V (Ankara, 1982), 7–8.

71 Session of 13<sup>th</sup> June 1325 (1909), *Ceridesi, Devre*, 5–6.

72 Address of the Greek member of parliament from Salonica Yorgi Honeos, *Ceridesi, Devre*, 7; Parliamentary session of 18<sup>th</sup> June 1325 (1909), *Ceridesi, Devre*, 135.



their blood for the defence of the country [...] I ask for the recruitment of Muslims and Non-Muslims alike [...] military service is an obligation of honour.»<sup>73</sup> Practically all non-Muslim representatives from the Balkans and Anatolia favored military service as a constitutional duty. The Jewish member of parliament from Salonica, Emanuel Karaso, declared that «all Ottomans are equal and have to serve in the army.»<sup>74</sup> However, both the government and some Muslim members of parliament showed little enthusiasm for the motions of their non-Muslim colleagues. The Grand Vizier Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa hinted at the potentially disastrous financial consequences the abolishment of military exemption tax would imply for the budget. Thus he highlighted the budget's deficit and advocated the maintenance of exemption tax for non-Muslims working in trade and commerce above the age of 23. Their conscription would cause a severe setback to the economy.<sup>75</sup> Habib Bey, a Turkish member of parliament from Bolu, could not detect the slightest benefit deriving from military service for non-Muslims. He claimed that 300 000 non-Muslims would have to be recruited as soldiers who had no previous military experience. It would take them three to four years to acquire military knowledge and that would pose a significant financial burden to the state. Furthermore, the general command of Turkish was rather poor: «In which language do you intend to command? Are we to bring in officers from Bulgaria, which are able to command and to instruct? Go to Macedonia and see for yourself how good the command of Turkish is among the local population. It would take them three to four years to learn Turkish.»<sup>76</sup>

Despite these doubts the Unionist Party was resolved to introduce general service. Eventually the law «On Military Service for Non-Muslims» was passed on 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1325/7<sup>th</sup> of August 1909, and the military exemption tax was finally abolished.<sup>77</sup> However, the implementation of general conscription met with little acceptance in the empire: Especially in the Balkans, the situation proved to be difficult. The Greeks in particular demanded the formation of separate units based on religious denominations. Since the very beginning of the discussion on conscription of non-Muslims the Greek-Orthodox patriarchate had always insisted on the separation of Muslims and non-Muslims in different units. After the introduction of general conscription the Patriarch visited the Sultan and demanded the formation of religiously segregated units. He argued that neither Christians nor

73 Session of 20<sup>th</sup> June 1325 (1909), Ceridesi, *Devre*, 169.

74 Parliamentary session 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1325 (1909), Ceridesi, *Devre*, 195. For further discussions revolving around the conscription of non-Muslims, see session of 29<sup>th</sup> June 1325 (1909), Ceridesi, *Devre*, 325–332.

75 Parliamentary session of 13<sup>th</sup> June 1325 (1909), Ceridesi, *Devre*, 8.

76 Session of 18<sup>th</sup> June 1325 (1909), Ceridesi, *Devre*, 132–133.

77 *Düstur* [corpus juris], series II, vol. I: 1326–1327 [1908–1909]. *Dersaadet* 1329 [Istanbul, 1911], 420–421. On 29<sup>th</sup> July 1325 / 11<sup>th</sup> August 1909 the new law became effective on publication in the official organ *Takvim-i vekayi*, see Hacısalihöğlü, *Jungtürken*, 282.

Muslims would be willing to serve in the same units.<sup>78</sup> This demand surfaced again in negotiations with the Greeks, taking place after the Young Turkish Revolution in 1908. A Greek memorandum addressing the Young Turks Committee stated that the formation of separate units secured the discipline in the army and enabled the soldiers to attend to their religious duties such as prayers.<sup>79</sup> Extending the law to all non-Muslims was seen as a discriminatory measure among the Greek designed to «turkify» the population.<sup>80</sup> Slav-Bulgarian reactions towards the new law also proved to be hostile. Bulgaria vindicated her rejection of general conscription vis-à-vis the imperial powers by referring to the vehement protests against recruitment of Christians from the «Turkish population».<sup>81</sup> Greek members of parliament issued a memorandum on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1910 (old style) complaining about legislative loopholes with regard to non-Muslim soldiers: They demanded that Christian priests should be introduced for religious services. At the end of 1910, the Greek Patriarch filed two petitions regarding school education and military service. In an additional petition of February 1911, the Patriarch claimed that the concept of the «Ottoman Nation» essentially implied the adoption of Islam and the Turkish language.<sup>82</sup> The spiritual leaders of the major Christian groups, the Greek-Orthodox Patriarch, the Armenian-Gregorian Patriarch and the Bulgarian Exarch, issued a joint memorandum in May 1911. They deplored the current state of school education and military service urging the government in several negotiations to promise major improvements which were eventually granted in November 1911.<sup>83</sup> The Greek population on the Aegean isles also showed fierce resistance against

78 Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerin*, 121–122.

79 Greek Memorandum of 12<sup>th</sup> August 1908, see «Report of the Bulgarian commercial agent of Salonica», No. 768, 13<sup>th</sup> August 1908, Centralen Däržaven Istoričeski Arhiv, Fond 334, Op. 1, a. e. 293, fol. 139–144; Hacısalihoğlu, *Jungtürken*, 234.

80 A. Suliotis-Nikolaïdis, *Organōsis Kōnstantinupo-leōs* [Organisation of Constantinople], ed. Th. Veremis and K. Bura (Athens, 1984), 86.

81 Correspondence of the Bulgarian Foreign Secretary Paprikov to the «Commissioned Ministers» of the Great Powers and the Istanbul legation, No. 1125, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1909, Centralen Däržaven Istoričeski Arhiv, Fond 176, Op. 2, a. e. 392, fol. 8–11, 8 r. v., 9. The Ottoman governor of Monastir informed the government that Bulgaria supported the dissemination of propaganda against the conscription of Bulgarians through the Bulgarian committee in Macedonia. Telegram from 16<sup>th</sup> October 1910, Y. H. Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi* [History of the Turkish Revolution], vol. II, part 1, (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1943, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Ankara, 1983), 188–189, 191. The Bulgarians demanded that Bulgarian recruits were only to do service on the Balkans.

82 Suliotis-Nikolaïdis, *Organōsis*, 112–117; A. Ch. Chamudopulu, *Hellēnismos kai Neoturkoi. Ethnikē drasis tu hypodulu Hellēnismu kata tēn Neoturkikēn periodon 1908–1912* [Greek World and the Young Turks. The National Impact of subdued Hellenism during the Young Turkish Era 1908–1912] (Thessaloniki, 1926), 18–24. For the text of the petitions see Suliotis-Nikolaïdis, *Organōsis*, 118–120, 125–127.

83 *Ibid.*, 165–169; V. Burilkov, *V Makedonija i Odrinsko (1908–1912). Mladoturskata Revoljucija vidjana ot specialnija korespondent na «Dnevnik»* [In Mazedonia and Adrianopol (1908–1912). The Young Turkish Revolution as seen by the Special Correspondent of «Dnevnik»], ed. I. Burilkova and C. Biljarski, Sofia, 1998/99, 318–321. The relations between the Young Turkish government and the Greek were particularly strained over the topic of military service for the Greek-Orthodox population. For further details see Hacısalihoğlu, *Jungtürken*, 302–308.

conscription, and many inhabitants of the isles emigrated. A survey undertaken in October 1910 revealed that in Istanbul alone one third of all non-Muslims eligible for conscription had fled to the United States.<sup>84</sup>

Reviewing the general perception of the new law, it becomes evident that the enthusiasm displayed by non-Muslims in parliament was not shared by large parts of the clergy and the non-Muslim population.<sup>85</sup> Recruitments from amongst Christian groups in Eastern Anatolia and Iraq partly infused competition among smaller Christian groups such as the Nestorians (*Nesturi*) and the Chaldeans (*Keldani*) within the Vilayet Mossul.<sup>86</sup> Extending military service to the remote territories of the empire turned out to be a serious problem which was discussed in parliament in 1909. İbrahim Efendi from İpek (*Peç*) declared in the parliament on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1909: «Gentlemen, I beseech you! It is high time we separate reality from fantasy. We are deluding ourselves. We ought to think of the situation of the population. Simply bear in mind the country west from us to Shkodra. We appear unable to reform the Porte in Istanbul, the reform of our first army is overdue. Please consider that large parts of the population from Shkodra to Basra do neither contribute soldiers nor pay taxes. They are not even aware of the fact that they are citizens. The other part of the population bears the heavy burden of conscription and taxes.»<sup>87</sup> At the same time the irregular cavalry regiments founded by Abdülhamid II were called into question (*Hamidiye Süvari Alayları*). Numerous Muslim and non-Muslim members complained that even the sons of Kurdish tribal leaders only ten years of age held high ranking officer titles. These troops inflicted a lot of damage. The discussion centred on the question whether to disband these regiments or whether there was still scope to reform them. But because of the general fear of upheavals and rebellions from Kurdish tribes the cavalry regiments were not disbanded and the issue was postponed.<sup>88</sup> Already the year 1910 was marked by local and regional revolts against the government's centralizing measures in those Kurdish, Arab and Albanian regions where tribal structures dominated.

84 U. Gülsoy, «Osmanlı Gayri Müslimlerinin Askeralma Kanunu'na Tepkileri ve Ege Adaları (1909–1912)» [Reactions of Ottoman Non-Muslims to the Recruitment Law and the Aegian Islands (1909–1912)], *Türk Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi* 3 (İstanbul, 2000), 93–102; A. Kara, *Yeni Kitaya Osmanlı Göçleri ve Neticeleri* [Ottoman Emigration to the New World and its Consequences] (İstanbul, 2007), 61–62, 91, 165. Half of all emigrants were eligible to military service, see *ibid.*, 82–83.

85 Zürcher points out that «the idea of Ottoman nation-building (known at the time as the idea of the İttihad-ı Anasır or Unity of the Elements) always was limited to a small, mostly Muslim, elite», see Zürcher, «Conscription System», 446.

86 The Patriarch of the Chaldeans issued a com-

plaint in March 1911 about the Nestorians, who endowed Chaldeans with religious honors suggesting they would thus be exempted from military service. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, DH-İD, 20/5, f. 3, 5. The reason for these complaints was that there had not been a census in Nestorian villages. Consequently there were no soldiers recruited. The government notified local administration that it should inform the people that an act of conversion would not imply exemption from military service. As a consequence, recruitment ratios in the region rose. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, DH-İD, 20/5, f. 2, 4, 10, 11; 25/4, f. 12, 13, 14, 17.

87 Session of 25<sup>th</sup> June 1325 (1909), Ceridesi, *Devre*, 257.

88 *Ibid.*, 249–266.

The Ottoman army was brought to its first serious test in the Balkan Wars of 1912/13. An army of united Balkan states attacked the Ottoman provinces and quickly succeeded in defeating the Ottoman army. Many contemporaries made the recruitment of non-Muslims, among other factors, responsible for the defeat.<sup>89</sup> Yet even before the Balkan Wars the military command had never fully trusted its non-Muslim soldiers: The majority served, often unarmed, in «labour-battalions».<sup>90</sup> However, the ensuing events revealed that such suspicions were not entirely unfounded. The interviews Leo Trotzki conducted with non-Muslim Ottoman soldiers in Bulgarian captivity demonstrate that non-Muslim soldiers did not receive a good military training. A Greek-Ottoman soldier replied to Trotzki: «Do you want to know why we were defeated? Because we did not know how to fight. He who knows how to fight is not likely to lose a battle. However, we have never been properly instructed how to fight. Consequently we were defeated.»<sup>91</sup> Evidently the loyalty of Ottoman Greeks or Bulgarians posed a particular difficulty for the wartime enemies Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia. Trotzki wrote: «It should be further noted that among the prisoners there are many Christians who also before the war were not loyal to the Turkish army and who are now gloating about the defeat of the Turkish army.»<sup>92</sup> After the Balkan Wars the idea of «Ottomanism» lost its appeal and the idea of a Turkish nation began to take root within the empire's political establishment.

In spite of these experiences Christians and Jews continued to be recruited to serve in the army. The recruitment law of May 1914 reconfirmed the legal regulations of 1909 according to which «all Ottoman citizens», except members of the Ottoman dynasty, were obliged to serve in the military.<sup>93</sup> Discussing various exemptions led to disagreements between the Treasury and the Ministry of War. The discussions preceding the drafting of the legislation reveal that the concept of a «Nation in Arms» had still not been entirely discarded. A committee inside the Treasury prepared a report on the abolition of exemption tax and the exemption from military service for all those who do not have a bread-earner for the family (*muinsiz*). They concluded that those measures would cost the state 1,400,000 Lira.<sup>94</sup>

89 H. N. Akmeşe, *The Birth of Modern Turkey. The Ottoman Military and the March to World War I* (London – New York, 2005), 125. There are various reasons for the military defeat. However, it is generally acknowledged that the Ottoman army command had significant difficulties in coordinating tactics, see A. T. Alkan, *İkinci Meşrutiyet Devrinde Ordu ve Siyaset* [Army and Politics in the Second Constitutional Period] (İstanbul, 2001), 189–200. The defeat was also attributed to a lack of patriotism among the soldiers generating demands for improving national education, see F. Adanır, «Zum Geschichtsbild der nationalen Erziehung in der Türkei», *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 10 (1998), 7–40.

90 Zürcher, «Conscription System», 447; N. Akmeşe, *Birth*, 114.

91 L. Trotzki, *Die Balkankriege 1912–13*, translated from Russian by H. Georgi and H. Schubärth (Essen, 1996), 225.

92 *Ibid.*, 221. However, there was also the example of brave Armenian soldiers in Yanya (Ioannina), who fought with great courage and sacrifice, see Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 166–167.

93 «Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Kanun-u Muvakkatı» [The Preliminary Law of Conscription], 29 Nisan 1330, in *Düstur* [corpus juris], series II, vol. VI: 1332–1333 [1913–1914]. Dersaadet 1334 [İstanbul, 1915/16], 662–704.

94 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, I.DUIT, 75/72, f. 10.

Secretary of War Enver Paşa wrote that the Ottoman nation would greatly benefit from the abolishment of all exemptions because thereby it would acknowledge the necessity of national defence by its citizens. Regardless of social status all sons of the fatherland would join the effort of national defence. The general benefit deriving from this could not be compared with the loss of 230,000 Lira tax exemption.<sup>95</sup> However, the Privy Council harboured doubts regarding the recruitment of non-Muslims whose sense of patriotism was questioned and whose recruitment was regarded as potentially weakening the army's future. It was emphasised that recruiting a group from the population which had never before assumed any responsibilities for the defence of the country would not only be detrimental to public finances but it would also affect the cohesion of the country.<sup>96</sup> The discussion shows that the Ottoman elite was clearly split in its stance towards the recruitment of non-Muslims. The reaction from Enver Paşa, however, shows that the «Party of Union and Progress» had still not ceased to believe in the idea of an Ottoman national army and the concept of a «School of the Nation».

Following the Ottoman mobilisation of 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1914, a provisional law was passed according to which all men under the age of 45 were liable to military service. All non-Muslim soldiers would have to serve in the army. Yet on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1914 the Ministry of War communicated via telegram to the regional governors that Christian recruits should be deployed in road construction. As a result, many non-Muslims were sent to join labour-battalions (*Amele Taburları*).<sup>97</sup> During the First World War numerous Muslim and non-Muslim soldiers deserted so that at the end of the war the overall number of deserters was four times higher than the actual number of men fighting at the front.<sup>98</sup> The desertion of non-Muslims, particularly of Armenians on the Eastern front who defected in large numbers to the Russian side, generated hatred among the Muslim soldiers.<sup>99</sup> The failure of the military campaign in Sarıkamış in 1914, the great number of casualties (approximately 90,000 men) and the victories of the Russian army deepened general suspicion against the Armenians. Against the background of Russian troops advancing and Armenian unrest, the Ottoman government decided on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1915 to disarm Armenian soldiers and have them dispatched

95 Ibid., I.DUIT, 75/72, f. 7.

96 Ibid., I.DUIT, 75/72.

97 Gülsoy, *Gayrimüslimlerinin*, 167–169; C. Mutlu, *Birinci Dünya Savaşında Amele Taburları* [Labour Battalions during the First World War] (Istanbul, 2007), 49–55.

98 Zürcher, «Conscription System», 449.

99 The diary of a Turkish soldier written during the Turko-Russian campaign in Sarıkamış in Eastern Anatolia in the winter of 1914/15 shows the hatred towards non-Muslim soldiers defecting to the Russians. Ali Rıza (Eti) Efendi, *Harb-i Umûmide*

*Hatırat-ı Askeriye* [Military Recollections from the Great War] (Istanbul, 2007), 126; M. Koraltürk, «Sarıkamış Harekâtı. Ali Rıza Efendi'nin Hatıraları» [The Campaign of Sarıkamış. The Memoirs of Ali Rıza Efendi], in: *Toplumsal Tarih* 161 (May 2007), 82–84. For Armenian deserters see S. R. Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians. Victims of Great Power Diplomacy* (London, 1987), 288–289. There exist numerous files on desertion from Muslims and non-Muslims in the Archives of the ministry of war, see for instance Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, I.DUIT, 102/13; 102/31; 102/32.

to labour-battalions. Furthermore, the Armenian population was to be evacuated from combat zones and deported to Iraq (*tehcir*, i.e. deportation).<sup>100</sup> This decision of the government, which had catastrophic consequences for the Armenian population, also marked the end of both the concept of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman army and of the idea of an «Ottoman Nation» itself. From the document cited above by Enver Paşa it can be concluded that amongst Ottoman elites the Young Turk unionist leadership held longest to the belief in an «Ottoman Nation». In November 1915 the government followed wishes expressed by the German government to declare a «holy war» against the allied powers. This step confirmed the view that the Ottoman army was generally viewed as an Islamic army during the First World War.<sup>101</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Reconsidering the course of events, it is evident that conscription failed as a tool of Ottoman nation-building: The Ottoman army remained in essence an army composed of peasants from Anatolia which would eventually proclaim the Turkish nation. This multi-ethnic Muslim population of Anatolia forms the military-nation within the boundaries of the new Turkish nation-state and the Turkish army can be seen as «School of the Nation» until the present day. One is taught to be a «Turkish citizen» by learning the language, reading and writing and internalising the values of the Republic. Similar to other areas, the Republic of Turkey profited from experiences made in the Ottoman era.<sup>102</sup>

The introduction of general conscription was accompanied by numerous setbacks and obstacles. Firstly, governments prior to 1908 were not interested in forming a multi-religious army. Despite the experience of the Crimean War and the focus on equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, the government continued to collect the exemption tax from Christians and Jews. The rejection of military service by non-Muslims proved to be equally problematic. Many of those liable to military service left the country. Establishing conscription in regions where tribal structures prevailed was particularly difficult, as the examples of Arab, Albanian and Kurdish provinces demonstrated. Various attempts by the unionist Young Turks to introduce military service resulted in bloody Arab and Albanian revolts. However, the concept of the «Ottoman Nation in Arms» suffered a serious setback in the course of the Balkan Wars of 1912/13. The «Ottoman national army» was quickly defeated by the national armies of the Balkan states, and nearly all European territories of the Ottoman Empire were annexed.

100 Y. H. Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi* [History of the Turkish Revolution], vol. III, part III (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Ankara, 1991), 8. For the Genocide discourse see D. Quataert, «The Massacres of Ottoman Armenians and the Writing of Ottoman History», *Journal*

*of Interdisciplinary History*, XXXVII:2 (Autumn, 2006), 249–259.

101 Bayur, *Tarihi*, vol. III, part I, 318.

102 Zürcher, «Conscription System», 449; Altınay, *Myth*.

In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, the idea of Ottomanism lost appeal while the Ottoman army nonetheless formally remained an «Ottoman national army» until the outbreak of the First World War. The military disasters on the eastern front at the very beginning of the war, the high number of deserters and a period of unrest in Armenia led the government to the decision to evacuate the Armenian population of Anatolia to Iraq. This can also be seen as the end of the Ottoman concept of a military nation. Yet the Ottoman Empire's experiences with the introduction of general conscription were not unique: other multi-ethnic and multi-religious empires, such as the Habsburg Monarchy or Tsarist Russia, were subject to similar experiences.

### **Inklusion und Exklusion: Die Wehrpflicht im Osmanischen Reich**

Durch die Einführung der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht im Osmanischen Reich sollten die Nichtmuslime, die bis dahin keinen Militärdienst leisteten, und die Muslime in den arabischen und kurdischen Provinzen, die in Stammesstrukturen lebten, in das Militärsystem integriert werden. Im Reformedikt von 1856 wurden Muslime und Nichtmuslime gleichgestellt und die Wehrpflicht für Nichtmuslime eingeführt. In der Praxis jedoch konnten sie der Militärpflicht durch Zahlung einer Militärsersatzsteuer entgehen. Für eine aus verschiedenen Religionsgemeinschaften zusammengesetzte Armee waren große Teile der osmanischen Elite nicht zu gewinnen, zumal die Militärsersatzsteuer eine wichtige Finanzquelle des Staates darstellte. Erst nach der Revolution der Jungtürken von 1908 widmete sich die Regierung der konsequenten Umsetzung der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht, die 1909 eingeführt wurde, weil man sie als Voraussetzung für die Schaffung einer osmanischen Staatsbürgernation ansah. Die Zentralisierungsmaßnahmen der jungtürkischen Regierung lösten jedoch zahlreiche Aufstände aus und wirkten für das Osmanische Reich eher desintegrierend. Hinzu kam die militärische Niederlage der multireligiösen osmanischen «Nationalarmee» im ersten Balkankrieg 1912. Der Erste Weltkrieg markierte das endgültige Scheitern des Konzeptes einer «Nation in Waffen» im Osmanischen Reich.

ABSTRACTS

### **Inclusion et Exclusion: La conscription obligatoire dans l'Empire ottoman**

Par l'introduction du service militaire obligatoire dans l'Empire ottoman on tâchait d'intégrer des non-Musulmans qui, auparavant n'avaient pas servi dans l'armée. De même, les Musulmans dans les provinces arabes et kurdes vivaient encore dans des sociétés tribales et on cherchait à les mieux intégrer dans l'empire par le service militaire. La Réforme de 1856, introduisant le service militaire aussi pour les non-Musulmans, mit Musulmans et non-Musulmans dans le même sac. Mais en pratique c'était possible pour eux de contourner le service militaire en payant une taxe de compensation. La plupart des élites ottomanes n'était pas favorable à une armée composée de communautés religieuses diverses, d'autant plus que la taxe de compensation était pour l'Etat une source de revenu considérable. C'est seulement après la révolution jeune-turque de 1908 que le gouvernement se consacrait sérieusement à la mise en pratique d'un service militaire obligatoire qui fut finalement introduit en 1909, parce qu'il était considéré indispensable pour la création d'une «Nation civique» ottomane. L'instauration de mesures centralisatrices par le gouvernement jeune-turc provoquait plusieurs insurrections. La centralisation avait donc des conséquences désintégrant, renforcées par la défaite de «l'armée nationale» multi-religieuse dans la première Guerre balkanique de 1912. La Première Guerre mondiale marqua l'échec définitif du concept d'une «nation armée» dans l'Empire ottoman.

**Assist.-Prof. Dr. Mehmet Hacısalihoğlu**

Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi

İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi

Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

(Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences

Department of Political Science and International Relations)

Main Campus, 34349 Yıldız/Istanbul/Turkey

e-mail: Hacisalihoglu.Mehmet@gmx.de