

# THREATENED OR THREATENING?: TWO BRITISH CONSULAR REPORTS REGARDING THE CONDITION OF NON-MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN İZMİR AND ALEPPO

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## **Abstract:**

*This article aims to elaborate on the condition of Non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century. In the literature that argues for a so-called 'Armenian genocide', it is written that the Ottoman Empire persistently suppressed Non-Muslim communities. With reference to two British consular reports from Aleppo and İzmir, this article argues that this was not the case. Rather, because of the Edict of Reform (Islahat Fermanı) of 1856 and protection of foreign diplomatic missions, the condition of Non-Muslim communities was better vis-à-vis the Muslims, both politically and economically. Accordingly, in İzmir and Aleppo, Non-Muslim communities dominated the economic life of the respective provinces and they enjoyed almost full equality with their Muslim counterparts.*

**Keywords:** *British Consuls in the Ottoman Empire, Aleppo, İzmir, the Edict of Reform, Non-Muslim Communities in the Ottoman Empire*

## **Öz:**

*Bu makale on dokuzuncu yüzyılın ortalarında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'daki gayrimüslim toplulukların durumunu incelemek üzere kaleme alınmıştır. Özellikle sözde 'Ermeni Soykırımı'nın varlığını kabul eden literatürde, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun gayrimüslim topluluklar üzerine büyük bir baskı uyguladığı yazılmaktadır. Bu makalede ise Halep ve İzmir'de bulunan iki İngiliz Konsolosun raporları dikkate alınarak durumun böyle olmadığı vurgulanmıştır. Zira 1856'da kabul edilen Islahat Fermanı ve yabancı diplomatik misyonların korunması neticesinde gayrimüslim toplulukların ekonomik ve siyasi durumu Müslümanlara kıyasla çok daha iyi duruma gelmiştir. İzmir ve Halep'te gayrimüslim topluluklar içinde buldukları vilayetlerin ekonomilerine hükmetmekle kalmamışlar, aynı zamanda Müslümanlarla büyük ölçüde aynı hakları kullanmışlardır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki İngiliz Konsoloslukları, Halep, İzmir, Islahat Fermanı, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda yaşayan gayrimüslim topluluklar*

## INTRODUCTION

Those who argue that Armenians were victims of the crime of 'genocide' committed by the Young Turk regime, generally trace their arguments back to the conditions of the Non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. They claim that these communities had been under constant pressure from the Ottoman Empire; they were discriminated, heavily taxed and they were even under the threat of armed attacks<sup>1</sup>. In other words, nineteenth century was a century of troubles for them, in which it was quite difficult to survive. Hence, they felt themselves insecure; and this feeling of insecurity proved right when Armenians were subjected to the so-called 'first genocide of the twentieth century'.

This article, on the other hand, argues that the situation of Non-Muslim communities in the Empire was not worse than the Muslims; it was in fact better. Within this context, it examines several documents from the British archives, dating back to the 1860s. This period is deliberately chosen, because particularly after 1856, with the declaration of *Islahat Fermanı* (Imperial Edict of Reform), British diplomatic agents in Turkey, who proclaimed themselves as the protectors of Christians in their own regions, were given the duty by the British government to prepare several reports regarding the situation of these communities. These reports are of considerable significance because they reflect the conditions of the Christian communities residing within the Ottoman Empire in this period.

This article is composed of four main parts. In the first part, the political and economic condition of the Ottoman Empire will be examined with reference to the events that occurred particularly in the mid-nineteenth century. The second part will deal with the letter and questionnaire of the British ambassador, Sir Henry Bulwer, sent to the British Consuls within the Ottoman Empire. The next part will cover the basic characteristics of two Ottoman cities, İzmir and Aleppo, since it was their Consuls that replied to the questionnaire. Understanding their

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<sup>1</sup> For this line of argumentation see Ternon, Yves, *The Armenians, History of a Genocide*, trans. By Rouben Cholakian, (New York: Caravan Books, 1981); Ternon, Yves, *The Armenian Cause*, trans. By Anahid Apeilian Mangouni, (New York: Caravan Books, 1985); Dadrian, Vakahn, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict From the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997);

similarities and differences is important in the sense that they give several clues for understanding the conditions of the Christians living there. Finally, in the last part, the answers to the questionnaire by the Consuls of Aleppo and İzmir will be evaluated.

## OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

The year 1856 is a decisive turning point in the course of Ottoman history. It marked the end of the Crimean War (1853-56), in which the Ottoman Empire, sided with Great Britain, France and the newly-established Sardinia (in some sources Piedmont), and defeated Russia. This war was not only significant because it demonstrated a temporary bulwark against Russian expansionism, but also because of the Treaty of Paris (30 March 1856), ending the war among the Great Powers of the period.

In the Article 7 of this Treaty, signatories “...declare the Sublime Porte admitted to participate in the advantages of the public law and system (Concert) of Europe [and they accepted]...to respect the independence and the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire”<sup>2</sup>. In other words, with this Treaty, the Ottoman Empire was admitted to The Concert of Europe, and its independence and territorial integrity was guaranteed by the Great Powers. This article is so significant that it is even used by many contemporary historians and political scientists as an indication of the acceptance of Turkey as a European state. Still, however, the Treaty of Paris would survive only two decades and this period of temporary relief ended with the disastrous War of 1877-78 between the Ottoman Empire and Russia.

The year 1856 is not only remarkable because of the end of the Crimean War and the Treaty of Paris. On 18 February 1856, just one week before the convention of the Congress of Paris to discuss the situation after the Crimean War, the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid (reigned between 1839 and 1861) declared a *Hatt-ı Humayûn* (an imperial edict), which was later called *Islahat Fermanı* (The Imperial Edict of Reform). This *ferman* granted many rights to the Non-Muslim communities living under the Ottoman rule: Muslims and Non-Muslims were accepted as equal before the law; nobody would be forced to convert from his/her religion to another one; there would be no difference among the people on the basis of ethnicity, religion or religious sect; Muslims and Non-Muslims would be

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2 For the full text of the Treaty of Paris, see [www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/wilkinson/ps123/treaty\\_paris\\_1856.htm](http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/wilkinson/ps123/treaty_paris_1856.htm)

admitted to public and military services equally<sup>3</sup>. Considering the British presence in India or the French presence in Algeria, it can easily be seen that this edict was beyond its time in granting such extensive rights to the Non-Muslim communities living in the Ottoman Empire. Neither the British, nor the French, at that time, had adopted such an ambitious document to grant several rights to the minorities living in their colonies.

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Ironically, this Imperial Edict was a European project. It was designed as a part of the negotiations among Britain, France and Austria during 1855 in Vienna, through which it was agreed that the Ottoman Empire should be forced to grant some rights to the Non-Muslim communities living in the Empire. Therefore, *Islahat Fermanı* was also cited in the Article 9 of the Treaty of Paris as follows<sup>4</sup>:

“His Imperial Majesty the Sultan having, in his constant solicitude for the welfare of his subjects, issued a *Firman*, which, while ameliorating their condition without distinction of Religion or of Race, records his generous intentions towards the Christian population of his Empire, and wishing to give a further proof of his sentiments in that respect, has resolved to communicate to the Contracting Parties the said *Firman*, emanating spontaneously from his Sovereign will.”

As it can be seen in the text of this article, it was aimed to establish full equality between Muslim and Non-Muslim communities of the Ottoman Empire. However, the result would be quite the opposite. Non-Muslim communities generally abused these extensive rights, and due to Great Power protection, the Ottoman Empire could do nothing to prevent these abuses. As a result, from 1856 onwards, (gradually), non-Christian communities gradually bettered their positions vis-à-vis and sometimes even at the expense of the Muslim communities. Economically, they eventually became the dominant groups residing within the Ottoman Empire despite the fact that their numbers were proportionally much less than the Muslims. In political terms, they became bureaucrats, diplomats, and even ministers. In other words, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled transformed dramatically.

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3 For the full text of this Imperial Edict, see Karal, Enver Ziya, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1977, Volume 5), p. 266

4 See, [www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/wilkinson/ps123/treaty\\_paris\\_1856.htm](http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/faculty/wilkinson/ps123/treaty_paris_1856.htm)

## THE QUESTIONNAIRE OF SIR BULWER

The letter and the attached questionnaire submitted by Sir Bulwer, the Ambassador of Britain in Istanbul, to the Consuls in the Ottoman Empire was a clear indication of British attempts

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to gather information about the region<sup>5</sup>. By the mid nineteenth century, anxious of the Russian complaints to Queen Victoria about the condition of the Christian community in the Ottoman Empire, the British Foreign Office aimed

to present an accurate account of the Christian communities living in the Empire to Europe and especially to Russia in order to prevent its ambitious aspirations. Therefore, in his address to the Consuls, Sir Bulwer wrote that the Russians argue that there was an unbearable pressure on the Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire, which could "...no longer be borne, inasmuch as that it is characterized by the grossest intolerance and persecution."<sup>6</sup> Indeed this was a clear act of intimidation towards Britain meaning that the Russians would take it upon themselves to intervene in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire with the pretext of protecting the rights of the Christian communities present therein. The British Foreign Office could not remain oblivious to this situation and decided to take steps to counteract this, the first of which was to learn what the conditions of the Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire were.

Indeed, Bulwer was aware that the Russian claims, which assertively argued that the Christians were under constant pressure from the Ottoman Empire, were exaggerated. He argued that the complaints of Russia were observable in all countries across Europe. What is more, contrary to these claims of suppression, he wrote that the scope of religious toleration in the Ottoman Empire was broader than the practices of many European governments, since it has been a traditional characteristic of the Turkish domination<sup>7</sup>. According to him, the responsibility of Ottoman mal-administration should not only be placed on the Ottoman govern-

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5 See, "Circular addressed by Sir H. Bulwer to Her Majesty's Consuls in the Ottoman Dominions, Constantinople, June 11, 1860" Şimşir, Bilal, (ed.), *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians, Volume I (1856-1880)*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989), p. 10

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., p. 11

ment; rather those Christian subjects who were spoiled by the foreign protectors should also shoulder some of the blame. He laconically summarized the situation of the Christian community as such: “It seems to me, indeed, that more evil arises at present from the want of power and authority somewhere, than from the actual abuse of power and authority anywhere”<sup>8</sup>.

Within this context he demanded the British Consuls in the Ottoman Empire to state the conditions of the Christian community living in the regions that they served. He formulated twenty-four questions to be answered. These questions could be grouped under three broad categories. The first category contains questions regarding the general condition of the respective provinces and its population statistics. The second category, on the other hand, deals specifically with the situation of the Christians in these provinces and their conditions vis-à-vis the Muslim population. Here, his questions also touched upon the issues such as religious tolerance or freedom of worship. Finally, in the third category, Bulwer aimed to learn the opinions of the Consuls on the problems of the Christian community and the possible solutions of these problems.

As indicated above, in this article, two answers to Bulwer’s questionnaire will be examined. The first one was written on July 28, 1860, by Mr. Blunt, the Consul of İzmir<sup>9</sup>; whereas, the second answer was written on August 4, 1860, by Mr. Skene, the Consul of Aleppo<sup>10</sup>. But before closely examining these two answers in a comparative sense, it would be useful to look at these two important cities of the Ottoman Empire in order to understand the spirit of the time as well as the general conditions of the Christian communities living in these cosmopolitan cities.

### **ALEPPO AND İZMİR: TWO COSMOPOLITAN CITIES OF THE EMPIRE**

Being two significant trading cities of the Ottoman Empire, both cities shared several common characteristics. First of all, both of them are extremely important for their commercial background. Aleppo was a significant city of commerce dating back to 2000 B.C. It has always been an intersection point of many trade

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8 Ibid.

9 See, “Consul C. Blunt to Sir H. Bulwer, Smyrna, June 28, 1860” in Şimşir, Bilal, (ed.), *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians, Volume I (1856-1880)*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989), pp. 15-22

10 See, “Consul Skene to Sir H. Bulwer, Aleppo, August 4, 1860” in Şimşir, Bilal, (ed.), *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians, Volume I (1856-1880)*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989), pp. 22-31

routes including the Roman, Byzantine and Arab-Islamic ones as well as the Silk Road. However, despite its geographical location and oldness, its commercial character was generally shadowed by Antioch (Antakya) or Damascus for centuries<sup>11</sup>. The revival of Aleppo's significance in commerce was realized under the Mamluk rule. After that, although ruled from Damascus under the Ottoman rule, Aleppo continued to be one of the most significant commercial centers in the Ottoman Levant.

İzmir was also an ancient city dating back to classical Greek and Roman civilizations. However, its importance declined during the following centuries and the city could only be revived by the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries as a commercial center<sup>12</sup>. Particularly, with the increasing significance of the Mediterranean commerce, the city turned out to be a vital link between Anatolia and the European mainland. Its fertile hinterland also contributed to its rise. Particularly agricultural raw materials produced in Western Anatolia were exported from İzmir to Europe. Thus in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the city, like Aleppo, was one of the most significant trading centers of the period.

A second point of similarity was the presence of Christian communities in these cities, in other words, their cosmopolitan nature. By the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Aleppo, there emerged the nucleus of diplomatic communities, particularly of the Venetian, French and English merchants. Then by the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenian Culfa trading community came to the city and began to dominate the Iranian silk trade<sup>13</sup>. This was followed by the local Christian Arab population, the Jewish community as well as North African and Indian communities. Thus there emerged a very cosmopolitan city.

Similarly, in İzmir, Venetian, French, English and Dutch trading and diplomatic communities began to emerge in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and a new 'Frankish quarter' was established in the city<sup>14</sup>. Local merchant communities such as Armenians, Jews, and the Greeks also engaged in commercial relations with the European merchants. Thus, İzmir turned out to be one of the most cosmopolitan cities of the Ottoman Empire, even perhaps, as cosmopolitan as Istanbul or Thessalonica.

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11 Eldem, Edhem, [et. al.] (ed.), *Doğu ile Batı Arasında Osmanlı Kenti: Halep, İzmir ve İstanbul*, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2003), p. 3

12 Ibid., p. 92

13 Eldem, op. cit., p. 37

14 Ibid.,

Besides these similarities, there are significant differences as well. Geographically, İzmir, itself, had been a harbor city, which had direct access to the seaways of the Mediterranean via the Aegean Sea; whereas, Aleppo was an interior city, always in search for an outlet to the Mediterranean. For a long time, Antakya served as the harbor of Aleppo, but this dependence created a different type of commercial city compared to İzmir.

Secondly, although both cities included a significant Christian and Jewish community, the degree of their cosmopolitanism differed. The Non-Muslim population of İzmir

was almost equal to that of the Muslim population, and even exceeded it by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century whereas, in Aleppo, the Muslim population always outnumbered that of the Non-Muslim communities.

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Third, being an Anatolian province İzmir was directly linked to the central administration of Istanbul; whereas, in Aleppo, the Ottomans established weaker linkages ties with the capital by preserving the local political elite. Although both cities benefited from a certain degree of autonomy due to their commercial nature particularly after the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Aleppo had a longer and deeper tradition of autonomous administration compared to İzmir.

In all, commerce was the fate of both cities in general. It was this characteristic that transformed the cities into two significant commercial centers of the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as enriched their culture and social structure through the amalgamation of different communities. This coexistence was generally not very problematic until the mid-nineteenth century; however, the combination of the decline of the Ottoman Empire and foreign intervention clouded the harmonious interaction among these communities.

## THE CONSULAR REPORTS ANSWERING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

After this background information, in the remaining part of the article the answers of the Consuls of Aleppo and İzmir will be examined in a comparative sense. As indicated above, Bulwer's questionnaire began with the questions regarding the general condition of the respective provinces and population statistics. Consul Blunt replied to these questions with a clear statement that the general condition of the province of İzmir is constantly improving due to increasing cultivation

and increasing agricultural production. However, according to him this improvement was "...more generally to the advantage of the Christian races." This was

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because of the lack of Turkish manpower to further cultivate the agricultural lands of Western Anatolia. Due to military conscription, Turks went abroad quite often and their lands remained uncultivated. Most of them could not return; if they could, they would generally find no

way to sell their lands since they were unable to recover financially. As Bulwer wrote these returnees "usually fall into the meshes of some Christian usurious banker, to whom the whole property or estate soon sacrificed... [and]...the purchasers are either Armenians or Greeks".

In other words, starting from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the economic balance between the Muslim and Christian communities tilted towards the latter. Indeed, historically it can be said that the Turks never took much interest in commerce, thus the commercial sectors were dominated by Christian and Jewish merchants.. However, in the area of agriculture, it was the Turkish farmer that cultivated the land not only for economic but also for military purposes. Thus, the decline of the Turkish agricultural sector vis-à-vis the Non-Muslim communities represented a very significant socio-economic development.

Regarding the composition of the population in İzmir, Consul Blunt stressed the remarkable change of the proportion of the Christian population to the Muslim one because of the fact that the Muslim population was subject to conscription. He gave several statistical data on this matter. According to these data, in 1830 the Turkish population of İzmir was 80,000; whereas, it declined to 41,000 in 1860. On the other hand, the Greek population of the city was only 20,000 in 1830; whereas, it almost quadrupled in 1860, reaching 75,000 due to increasing migration from the countryside to the city. Adding almost 40,000 other Christian and Jewish communities, the number of Non-Muslim community in İzmir reached to 115,000, nearly tripling the number of Muslims. Regarding the whole province, whose population almost reached 1,000,000, two-third of this number was Muslim and one-third Non-Muslim.

Consul Skene also wrote that the province of Aleppo was in a good condition as regards the amount of production. In his words "...so rich is the soil, so in-

dustrious and frugal the laborer”. However, unlike İzmir, most of the fertile land laid waste because of the continuous incursions of the Bedouins. Considering the situation of the Christians he wrote that they are “a keen, money-making people, clever in trade, miserly at home, abject without support, and insolent when unduly protected”. Here again, the British diplomatic agent used a blaming discourse on the Christian communities of Aleppo. He argued that most of them were unjustly enriched and this created a reaction among the Muslim population of the province.

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Consul Skene gave a less detailed account of population statistics. He merely wrote that the total population of the province of Aleppo was close to 500,000, with one-fifth constituting Non-Muslim communities, and four-fifths constituting the Muslim community. Compared to İzmir, the proportion of the Non-Muslim communities was quite low, but still they had a great say in economic and commercial matters.

Regarding the question on the professional categorization of the population, both Consuls replied in the same manner. They wrote that almost all the proprietors were the Muslims; whereas almost all the merchants were from the Non-Muslim communities. However, there is a significant discrepancy with respect to this matter. While, in Aleppo, land proprietorship was quite limited for the Christians, in İzmir, as Charles Blunt wrote, although all the land belonged to the Muslims, the Christians cultivated most of it. In other words, although in theory the land proprietorship belonged to the Muslims in accordance with Ottoman legal system, in practice the land was not used by them much; rather the Christians cultivated it. The reasons were manifold, but the most important of them was the continuous and defeating wars of the Empire since the late seventeenth century. Lack of enough Muslim manpower due to conscriptions resulted in the Christian take over and cultivation of the agricultural lands.

Following these questions on the general condition of these two provinces, specific questions were asked to the Councils in order to learn whether Christian and Muslim populations were enjoying equal rights. Indeed these questions were significant because throughout the answers given to them, the British Foreign Of-

fice tried to understand whether the Imperial Edict of Reform of 1856 had been properly applied or not.

The first three questions regarding the equality of Muslim and Christian populations were about the economic issues<sup>15</sup>:

- Can Christians hold landed property on an equal condition with the Turks; and if not, where is the difference?
- Can Christians exercise trade in towns on equal terms with the Turks; and if not, in practice where is the difference?
- Is the Christian peasantry in the Christian villages as well of generally as the Muslims; and if not where is the difference?

Consul Blunt answered that the Muslims and Christians in the province of İzmir enjoyed equal rights regarding land proprietorship and trade. In his words, “[b]oth Turk and Christian are upon a footing of perfect equality”. However, Consul Skene wrote that there were four species of tenure of land in the Ottoman Empire and only two of them were available for the use of the Christians. These were ‘Mulkh’, or freehold property, and ‘Miri’ or the crown lands. The other two types of land, namely ‘vakouf’, or the land accrued by the pious foundations, and ‘malikaneh’, the land belonging to the families of *Sipahis* could not be owned or used by the Christians. Regarding trade, similar to Consul Blunt, Consul Skene wrote that there is perfect equality.

The answers given to the third question, namely on the comparative position of the peasantry, were quite interesting. Consul Blunt wrote that “...the Christians are much better off than the Turks; for there is no drain upon the Christian population for troops, and Christians pay the same taxes on their produce”. He also mentioned that the Turkish peasantry “...is, without doubt, more frequently subject to oppression than the Christian”. He argued that whenever a disagreement occurred between the state officials and the villagers, the Christian villager had always been protected by foreign Consuls, whereas there was no such mechanism for the protection of the rights of the Muslim peasantry; therefore they suffered the most.

After indicating that there is no Christian village in the province of Aleppo except for some Armenian villages near Maraş, Consul Skene admitted that the

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15 “Circular addressed by Sir H. Bulwer...”, p. 14

“...Armenian peasants cultivate the land of the Mussulman proprietors, by whom they are protected, and their condition is consequently as good as that of the Mahometan peasantry”. This falsified the Armenian claims that the Armenians lived under miserable conditions in the Ottoman Empire.

A similar question was asked regarding the overall conditions of the Christian population and whether they had improved over the last twenty years. After emphasizing that he had been to Turkey in 1820, Consul Blunt argued that from that time onwards “Christian population...is not only better off...than they were five, ten, fifteen and twenty years ago, but they feel and know they are so.” In other words, supported by the foreign powers, the Christian population began to be aware of their power and potential. Consul Skene, replied in the same fashion and added that the progress made by the Christian population reached a degree which presented a threat even for the Christians themselves since the “...Muslims are jealous of their prosperity in trade and exasperated by their arrogance when they obtain Consular protection.”

“...Turkish authorities are ever ready to lend their assistance to keep order and prevent any indecent interruption of the ceremonies.”

The next question was about judicial matters. Sir Bulwer asked the Consuls whether Christian evidence was admitted to the Courts of Justice. Consul Blunt replied that in the interior the judges did not admit the Christian evidence in cases against Muslims but there is only one single case of such in which, at the end, Christian evidence was admitted. However, in the Courts of the cities of Aydın and İzmir, Christian evidence was properly admitted. What is more, Consul Blunt pointed out an interesting detail. He wrote that the foreign Christian evidence is not admitted against the native Christian. In other words, the Ottoman judicial system tried to protect its own Christian citizens against foreign intervention.

To the same question, Consul Skene replied that in Aleppo, in theory Christian evidence was not admitted; however, there was no such case in practice. He wrote that in the case of a judicial dispute between a Christian and a Muslim, an Arbitration Commission was appointed and in civil, commercial or correctional cases, Christian evidence might be regarded.

Questions regarding religious freedom followed. Sir Bulwer asked whether

there were inequalities pertaining to religion and whether the Christian population had difficulties in their religious affairs, such as construction of churches or

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other religious practices.

Consul Blunt replied that there was neither any inequality based on religion nor any restriction for the religious matters. He even wrote that during their religious observances, "...Turkish authorities are ever ready to lend their assistance to keep order and prevent any indecent interruption of the ceremonies". Consul Skene gave the same reply and enlisted four new churches built in the Province.

Another interesting question is about the condition of Protestants living in the Ottoman Empire. Although the complaints of Russia were generally about the Orthodox population, Protestant Britain also asked whether Protestants were being persecuted, either by the Ottomans or by other Christians. Consul Blunt replied that Protestant Ottoman subjects are under the special protection of the Turkish authorities and this protection was necessary in order to prevent the 'fanatical enmity of other Christian sects and Jews. He further added that similarly, Consul Skene wrote that pressure was exerted on the Protestant community not by the Ottomans but by the Church, which they had left. Thus Ottoman protection was a significant mechanism to deter this pressure.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

While in political and military sense the Ottoman Empire was in a constant decline throughout the nineteenth century, in the social sphere there emerged a new configuration of interaction between the 'ruler' and the 'ruled' as well as among the 'ruled'. Regarding the interaction between the 'ruler' and the 'ruled' Tanzimat and Islahat reforms restricted the authority of the former and increased the rights of the latter by articulating that every Ottoman citizen was equal. This equality was quite significant since there are not many examples of such an understanding even in Europe. However, it was generally abused by the former 'millets' of the Ottoman Empire at the expense of the Muslim population, particularly because of the foreign intervention and support towards themselves.

The consular reports prepared by the British Consuls in Aleppo and İzmir were quite conspicuous in this sense. They were written in response to the question-

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naire of the British Ambassador in İstanbul, who had been instructed to gather data for the British Foreign Office. The British Foreign Office aimed to show that the condition of the Non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire was not as negative, because there was the Russian claim that Ottomans persistently suppressed these communities. Indeed the British were aware that this was a pretext for the Russians to intervene in the Ottoman Empire. In order to prevent this intervention, they have to show the European public opinion that the news about Ottoman suppression was a mere fallacy.

These reports were important in the sense that they attested that how Russian claims were invalid, and in fact opposite of these claims was the case. Accordingly, Ottoman pressure was not exerted upon the Non-Muslim communities; rather these communities were quite well off both economically and socially. Of course, this does not mean that there had not been any discord between the Muslims and Non-Muslims. Particularly because of economic decay as well as social disturbances there occurred significant quarrels; however, there has never been a state policy regarding the suppression of Non-Muslim communities.

Armenians, being one of the most significant Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire, were not an exception. They were not a suppressed nation in the mid nineteenth century. They lived under equal conditions with the Muslim communities, sometimes, as Consul Skene writes, even better than the Muslims. In sum, Armenian claims that they were persecuted throughout the nineteenth century by the Ottoman Empire are invalid. Rather, the reasons of deterioration of the Ottoman-Armenian relations must be traced to a later period and particularly to the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the Armenians came to the fore with the demand of independence.