

Beyond the Midye-Enez Line: Reclaiming Edirne during the Balkan Wars

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[Paper Presented at the 2019 ASN World Convention, Columbia University, 2-4

May 2019]

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The summer of 1913 marked an important turning point for the establishment of the western borderlands of Turkey in the early 20th century. The London Peace Conference on May 30th, 1913 following the First Balkan War established the border as a straight line between two port cities, Midye (Midia) in the Black Sea and Enez (Aynos) in the southern edge of Thrace on the Aegean coast. The Ottomans were pushed to the east of this line, effectively ending their control over most of their European territories. This space excluded Edirne, an imperial city of the Ottoman Empire. As the Second Balkan War erupted between the victorious Balkan nation states immediately after, the Ottoman army recaptured the city on July 22nd, rendering the Midye-Enez line obsolete. This paper draws evidence from the Ottoman Foreign Ministry and the Chief of Staff's Balkan War archives to establish the role Edirne played in the negotiation of the western borderlands of Turkey beyond this imaginary (constructed) line between Midye and Enez, thus shedding new light on these negotiated spaces and the importance of Edirne.

The significance of the city of Edirne from the perspective of the Ottomans was obvious, even to the outside observers. One contemporary British author, Ellis Schaap described it this way in *The African Times and Orient Review* in August 1913:

“Whatever decision the Powers may come to, one thing is certain, Turkey *will never evacuate* Adrianople. It cannot do so. The fate of the Turkish nation is bound up with the question of the retention of this city. By giving way the Government would be regarded not only as traitors by the army that has sworn to defend Adrianople to the last men, but every Muslim in the country, irrespective of party, would be prepared to wreak vengeance on a cabinet guilty of such a gross betrayal of national and religious interests.”¹

I offer the argument based on the archival evidence from the Prime Ministry’s Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, Turkey and Chief of Staff’s Balkan Wars Archives in Ankara, Turkey that not only was this perception predominant among the ranking bureaucrats and military officers, but they often strengthened it with military, political, social and cultural arguments.

Edirne (Adrianople), once an imperial capital before the conquest of Istanbul (Constantinople) in 1453, had always been an important Ottoman urban center, especially in the European territories of the Empire, because of the proximity to its later capital, and

Author’s Note: The research for this paper is funded by the Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship.

¹Ellis Schaap, “Adrianople, the Turks and the Powers”, *The African Times and Orient Review* 2,14 (August 1913): 46-47.

the overland trade routes on which it was a key point. The city also had a cosmopolitan society, populated by different ethnic and religious groups, including significant numbers of Muslims, Jews, Bulgarians, Greeks, and Armenians. By 1905, its population was approximately 80,000; 30,000 Muslims, 22,000 Greeks, 12,000 Jews, 10,000 Bulgarians, and 4,000 Armenians.

The historiography of the 19th century puts the city of Edirne in an academically unwieldy place, in between the Balkans and the Middle East—belonging to both without being fully situated in either one. Nationalist historians who focus on post-Ottoman nation-states and Middle East specialists alike have ignored Edirne to a large extent. Hence, the city has not received much scholarly attention.² Many recent works on the historiography of the period following the Young Turk revolution of 1908 or the Second Constitutional Period, primarily focus on complicating the process of transition from empire to nation-state. For instance, as authors like Michelle Campos and Bedross Der Matossian have shown, the period surrounding this revolutionary fervor demonstrated that diverse Ottoman groups could and did join together in their pursuit of a common Ottoman citizenship, but also that local and global events could and did intersect to cause

² For a comparison of the Tanzimat reform processes in Edirne and Ankara from a sociological perspective, Yonca Köksal, “Local Intermediaries and Ottoman State Centralization: A Comparison of the Tanzimat Reforms in the Provinces of Ankara and Edirne (1839-1878),” (PhD. Diss., Columbia University, 2002). For a study of the earlier period of Edirne, the 17th and the 18th centuries, with a focus on the urban structure and the historical interaction of the city with its *mahalles*, Yunus Uğur, “The Historical Interaction of the City and Its Mahalles: Ottoman Edirne in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries,” (PhD. Diss., Bogazici University, 2014).

tensions in these groups at the same time as they were exploring a common citizenship identity.³

Edirne became a more significant Ottoman urban center during the 19th century as the Empire lost many of its European territories due to frequent wars and the rise of new nation-states in the Balkans. This experience gradually put the Edirne at the western frontier of the Empire, and the city was occupied by the Russian army in 1829 and during the Turco-Russian wars of 1877-78.

The Balkan Wars resulted in a major and a final territorial loss for the Ottoman Empire in Europe, which included the Eastern Thrace. Edirne was recaptured by the Ottomans during the Second Balkan War and, after the loss of Salonica (Thessaloniki), became the only remaining significant urban center in the Ottomans' European territories and western borderlands. Throughout this turbulent time, first the loss and then the recapture of the city became a focal point of the public discourse. The members of the Young Turk Movement and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) leaders rallied for the recapture of Edirne after the city was retained by Bulgarians following the London peace treaty that ended the First Balkan War. The eventual recapture of the city in July 1913 provided them with further support.

³ For more information, Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), and Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

The cosmopolitan nature of Edirne and the territorial changes surrounding it during the Balkan Wars make the city central to my broader research agenda which explores the special place borderlands came to have in competing nationalist and imperial discourses.⁴ This paper sheds light onto the shifting boundaries and changing imperial/national identities in this period of turmoil as I utilize the Balkan Wars as a stage to explore the negotiations that were taking place.

The renegotiation of the Midye-Enez line between the two Balkan Wars is an important episode of these negotiations. The Ottoman army recaptured Edirne in July 1913, when the Balkan states started fighting against Bulgaria. The Ottomans perceived this as an opportunity to create a *fait accompli* (*emrivaki*). The ambassador to Paris, Rifat Pasha, for instance, in a telegram right before the recapture, proposed the idea of reoccupying the territory up to the shores of Meric-Ergene river without the consent of the European Powers. He argued that with so many events (*bunca vekayi*) happening in

⁴ For an example in the American context, see Rachel C. St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). For the European context, Catherine Tatiana Dunlop, *Cartophilia: Maps and the Search for Identity in the French-German Borderland*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). For German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman contexts, Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (eds), *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Borderlands*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013). For the Ottoman Eastern borderlands, Sabri Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843-1914*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), and Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militia in the Tribal Zone*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), and for the Southern borderlands, Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and Hijaz*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016) and Matthew H. Ellis, *Desert Borderland: The Making of Modern Egypt and Libya*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

the Balkans, the European Powers would not force the Ottomans to evacuate this ‘small’ occupied land mass (*küçük bir kıta-i arazi*) between the Meric-Ergene river and the Midye-Enez line.⁵ Inaction (*atalet*) right now, he argued, would be the worst option. Rifat Pasha concluded that such a *fait accompli* would be a well-deserved right (*en sağlam bir hak*) for the Ottoman government, thus pushing for this course of action.

Retaking the city was enabled by the infighting among the Balkan states, as the occupying Bulgarian forces had to relocate to other front lines. Nevertheless, military and foreign ministry archives provide us with ample evidence suggesting a deliberate attempt to legitimize, with various arguments, the recapture of Edirne by pushing the Midye-Enez line further west and retaining the city within the formal borders of the Ottoman Empire.

The most frequently expressed military argument for the recapture of Edirne was the concern for the defense of Constantinople. The Midye-Enez line basically put the Western border of the Empire very close to Constantinople, without any natural defense line in between. The Grand Vizier Said Halim Pasha, for instance, reiterated this at great length in a telegram to Tevfik Pasha, the ambassador to London. He stated that Meric river constituted a natural border and that holding onto Edirne or the territory west of Midye-Enez was the ‘sole assurance’ for the defense of Dardanelles and hence Constantinople.⁶

⁵ July 12, 1913. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri [Prime Ministry’s Ottoman Archives], BOA Hariciye Siyasi [Foreign Ministry Political] HR SYS 1974-1-18/19.

⁶ July 27, 1913. Şifreli Telgraf No:35 183/348 [1466] in Sinan Konuralp and Gül Tokay (eds), *Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on the Origins of World War One*, (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2012), 252.

We also observe that military and civilian bureaucrats argued how Edirne, as the imperial capital prior to Constantinople, had a cultural significance. The size of the Muslim population in the province was also given as an important reason for the necessity of Ottoman sovereignty over the city. For instance, a note sent from the Foreign Ministry to the Ottoman Embassy in London expresses this point for Ottoman peace delegation after the First Balkan War. It was argued that Edirne was the ‘second’ imperial capital (*ikinci payitaht*), and essentially a ‘Muslim city’, making it crucial for the Empire to hold onto.⁷

Indeed, some Ottoman bureaucrats thought Bulgarians would prefer to give up their control over Edirne and the surrounding areas, as the area would consist of a significant Muslim population relative to the size of the new Bulgarian nation-state. Ottoman Ambassador to Vienna, Huseyin Hilmi Pasha reported in a note that he had made this point clear to his counterparts in Vienna, and argued that the new state of Bulgaria with its 3 million inhabitants would be reluctant to have an additional population of 2 million Greeks and Muslims under its rule.⁸ He made the case that such a large non-Bulgarian population would present a source of vulnerability (*mucib-i zaaf*) for the new Bulgarian state. Moreover, he emphasized that securing the border by letting Ottomans keep Edirne, would make the Bulgarian state stronger (*daha kavi*) against its well-known ‘eternal’ (*hısm-ı ebedisi*) enemies, Serbia and Greece.

⁷ December 27, 1912. BOA HR SYS 2088-42-1/3.

⁸ August 23, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-2-98.

The Ottomans announced their reoccupation of the city to the European Powers with a diplomatic note that emphasized the strategic importance of Edirne. The sustainability of Midye-Enez line as a permanent border between the Ottoman Empire and newly independent Balkan states had been questioned by the Ottoman bureaucrats using these arguments. After the Ottoman army moved back into Edirne to take control using the opportunity presented by the infighting among Balkan states, the Ottoman Foreign Ministry sent this diplomatic note to the embassies of the European Powers.⁹ The purpose of the note was to explain why Edirne should be under Ottoman rule and why the Midye-Enez line could not have survived as a permanent border.

The note started by putting the blame on Bulgarians for not giving up the control of some of the land back to the Ottoman army after the peace treaty despite their push for a speedy agreement. The note suggested that Ottomans were fed up with waiting this peaceful land turnover to take place and ordered the reoccupation of its own land (*kendi arazisini tekrar işgal*). It went on to declare to the European Powers that in order to secure the defense of the capital and the Dardanelles strait, any borderline that started from Enez should go up north along the Meric river. This was exactly what the Ottoman military and foreign service officials had tried to propagate in the London peace treaty. In fact, the diplomatic note speculated that the only reason the European Powers did not accept this line initially at the peace conference was their desire to get a speedy resolution in London by avoiding further Bulgarian obstructionism.

⁹ July 26, 1913. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı Balkan Harbi [Chief of Staff's Balkan Wars], BLH 558-3-9-2.

The note claimed that the Ottoman state had always pursued a resolution to the conflict via diplomatic means. Unfortunately, the note iterated, the underlying cruel and destructive rule (*suret-i vahşiyane ve tahribane*) in the occupied territories and the extent of the oppression and corruption (*itisafat*) that was allowed under Bulgarian occupation, convinced the Ottoman state that a resolution through diplomatic means was not possible. The note clearly elaborated a narrative to legitimize the recapture of Edirne by questioning the legitimacy of the Midye-Enez line, ex-post. As the note was sent to foreign missions of the European Powers, it ended with a long and elaborate plea for their intermediation in successfully setting up a resolution. It declares that, Ottomans wanted this conflict to end with a defensible and a peaceful border (*emniyetli ve selametli bir hudud*) and establish a natural and continuous relationship (*tabii ve devamlı bir münasebet*) with Bulgarians.

Documenting the Violence

After Edirne was recaptured, the fate of the city was still uncertain for some time awaiting the outcome of the peace negotiations between Ottomans, European Powers, and Balkan states following the Second Balkan War. Therefore, it became important for Ottoman bureaucracy to document and collect data about the alleged Bulgarian atrocities on the Muslim populace under occupation, to solidify the Ottoman take over and influence the outcome of the final settlement in their favor.

Official letters to various military units and outposts in the contested zone (in between the Midye-Enez line and the Meric river) ordered them to document eyewitness

testimonies of the atrocities committed during the occupation. For instance, on July 26th, 1913, right after the recapture, Edirne governor Adil Bey wrote to the military commanders who were stationed in the reclaimed territories from the Bulgarians, asking them to document Bulgarian ‘crimes’ they encountered. Starting his letter by referring to various atrocities (*enva-i mezalim*), murderous acts (*efal-i cinayetkarane*) and destruction (*tahribat*) committed by Bulgarians, he relayed this request in no uncertain terms.¹⁰ The stated purpose for collecting such information appeared to be two-fold. Adil Bey, a government bureaucrat, first alluded in the letter, to the importance of documenting these acts and preserving this information in the hands of the government (*nezd-i hükümetde hıfzı*) for recordkeeping purposes.

However, his explicitly-stated second purpose was directly related to the grater objective of influencing the outcome of the final settlement. Immediately after, Adil Bey highlighted the benefits of this documentation for influencing the public opinion (*enzar-ı amme*). He emphasized the significance of revealing this information to the public through the Ottoman as well as the foreign press (*Osmanlı ve ecnebi matbuatı*).

Military units became an important source of information gathering in this way. Since the area was effectively a contested territory between the Ottoman and Bulgarian military forces after the Ottoman recapture of Edirne, military officers were more likely than civilian ones to be present to execute Adil Bey’s order to document Bulgarian atrocities. In fact, he highlighted this in his letter to the commanders on the front lines.

¹⁰ July 26, 1913. BLH 146-107-1-1.

Since the advancing military units must have had witnessed these acts on their path, he argued, they should pay attention to the destroyed villages they came across. The letter not only asked for officers' personal observations (*meşhudat*) but also active participation by asking them to 'investigate' (*bittahkik*) in order to uncover the Bulgarian atrocities. Documenting the physical destruction in and around the city and the human toll and quantifying these injustices were expressed objectives. Military commanders ordered this documentation process to be very diligent, with tables (*cedvel*) and geographic sketches (*kroki*) elaborating as many details as possible.

Military officers on the ground responded to these requests by reporting on the incidents they could identify, often in graphic detail. There is documentation of these responses, and within a day or two, official correspondence started to include information in this regard. A vivid example of this was communicated by a particular commander of a unit, on July 27th-28th in which he referred to the results of Bulgarian brutality and even savageness (*netice-i vahşiyesi*).¹¹ He listed a set of reported incidents dating back to the occupation of Edirne by the Bulgarian army, when thirty to forty Muslim women were allegedly murdered; thrown into the river Arda, their hands tied behind their back, to be drowned. The officer did not stop there but also claimed to have attached photographic evidence of the bodies pulled out of the river.¹²

¹¹ July 27-28, 1913. BLH 146-107-1-4.

¹² We do not have the attachment as part of the archival material.

One important feature of this note by the commander to the military headquarters was that, in its list of Bulgarian atrocities, it included the assaults on the significant members (*eşrafın ileri gelenleri*) of the Greek community of Havsa. In fact, the commander indicated upfront in the note, how Bulgarian acts did not discriminate victims based on gender and ethnicity (*cins ve milliyet tefrik etmeyerek*).

The additional descriptions of such incidents were embellished by quantitative information and at times graphic details. For instance, he cited the ‘savage’ murder (*vahşiyane katl*) of twenty-five Muslim young men from Habibce, and the brutal mutilation of body parts, particularly breasts, of two local women, as well as mutilation of ears and nose of one Muslim man from Iskenderkoy. A report from Bolayir unit of the army also described incidents in Habibce. A note dated July 27th, 1913, cited that twenty Muslims were executed and three women were subjected to mutilation of their body parts as well.¹³

There are multiple archival sources recording the detailed eyewitness testimonies collected by the military personnel on the ground. One example is from Samana community, where two eyewitnesses were quoted recounting deaths from their village by naming almost everyone individually in their testimony.¹⁴ The minutes of the interview contained testimony by Ahmed (Akpoturlu) and Fehim (son of Huseyin). Ahmed’s testimony included names of ninety-one victims in his village, murdered over a two-day

¹³ July 27, 1913. BLH 146-107-1-2.

¹⁴ August 10, 1913. BLH 558-3-4-10/11/11a.

period by Bulgarian soldiers. Once again, he described the gruesome executions in detail. The second witness, Fehim, recounted the similar ordeal of his villagers with more personal details in his narrative. As such, these minutes claimed to provide a voice for witnesses by letting them describe their personal accounts.

The reports prepared by military officers often included descriptions with very precise quantitative information, sometimes even accompanied by detailed summary tables. One such example was a meticulous description of the damage inflicted in the town of Sofulu, written by the Sofulu platoon commander Colonel Mehmed Resid, with a table detailing how many houses (*hane*), mosques (*cami*), schools (*mektep*), and shops (*diikkan*) were destroyed. The report claimed 1659 deaths in the village of Edekoy, out of a population of 1800, within 190 households. The accompanying table then reported the headcounts in other villages of Sofulu, adding another 1200 to the human toll. This report combined accounts of eyewitness testimonies with the commander's investigation in Sofulu. In fact, he was keen on mentioning that the information in those tables were his own observations attained during his own investigation (*tahkikat*).¹⁵

His investigation also pointed out the role local Bulgarian as well as Greek militia units played in the atrocities and destructions in Edekoy. He reported that some Bulgarian and Greek militia had bribed the Bulgarian military commander to fabricate reports about the Muslim villagers of Edekoy committing murders in nearby locales, which provided

¹⁵ August 1, 1913. BLH 558-3-4-3.

the reasoning for the militia units to siege and attack the village and its Muslim inhabitants.

Aside from quantifying the destruction and the human toll, Colonel Mehmed Resid's report had an investigative purpose which was absent in other eyewitness accounts. As part of the table detailing the incidents for each village surrounding Sofulu, he also identified alleged perpetrators of these crimes. In most instances the perpetrators are claimed to be Bulgarian and Greek militia from neighboring villages. In a sense this report not only provided narratives of the victims, but also investigated and identified the alleged perpetrators of these atrocities.

Rallying local support

As the Ottoman army recaptured Edirne, other Muslim communities that are located further west of the Midye-Enez line (or of Edirne) were also encouraged to plea for Ottoman military help. For some communities this was a desire to defend themselves against Bulgarian militia. Military officers expressed concerns about Bulgarian militia units operating in parts beyond the newly reclaimed territory by the Ottomans. Even though they did not foresee territory west of Meric river to be part of the future Ottoman state, they were enthusiastic to help local Muslim communities who were threatened by the Bulgarian militia in the absence of a formally negotiated settlement.

For instance, in a note to the War Ministry, Hursid Pasha, a commander in the front lines, expressed his willingness to send a platoon temporarily to such a community in

Pasmakli in response to their plea for Ottoman protection, until the final settlement.¹⁶ Hursid Pasha's message about Pasmakli painted a dire picture for the local Muslim population, vulnerable to attack and subject to potential annihilation since they did not have tools for self-defense. It is notable that Hursid Pasha acknowledged that Pasmakli would not have possibly stayed under Ottoman sovereignty in a final settlement. In spite of this, he advocated to send a platoon for protection of the Muslim population from Bulgarian militia units until the regular occupying Bulgarian army arrived. This point of view obviously perceives Bulgarian militia units a more imminent threat than the regular army. However, it also provides context for conveniently legitimizing military presence in a disputed piece of land in the middle of an armed conflict.

Much like the people of Pasmakli, a petition signed by elders and neighborhood leaders in Dimetoka, dated August 23rd, 1913, pleaded for help from the Ottoman military headquarters.¹⁷ Expressing their pleasure with the recapture of Edirne first, the letter then went on to say how it was not possible to describe the cruelty (*zulmün tarifi kabil değildir*) in the hands of Bulgarians. Petitioners described conversions of their religious spaces into churches and forced conversions to Christianity under Bulgarian occupation. The petition nevertheless described in great length the local community's desire and willingness to defend themselves but indicated the lack of means due to the occupying Bulgarians' confiscation of arms from the local Muslim population. As with the case of Pasmakli, this petition from Dimetoka shows how Edirne's recapture raised the hopes of

¹⁶ August 17-18, 1913. BLH 150-120-18-2.

¹⁷ August 23, 1913. BLH 558-3-4-9.

Muslim communities west of the Midye-Enez line for Ottoman reoccupation despite its clear military challenges.

While former Ottoman subjects were pleading for help formally in forms of petitions, increasingly more mass gatherings and demonstrations in support of Ottoman rule sprung up in the area. The Ottomans publicized these public demonstrations (*mitingler*) in support of the Ottoman rule in Dimetoka, Midye, Sofulu and Edirne and the petitions declaring the local communities' appreciation for their liberation from the Bulgarian occupation.

For instance, a note from the office of the Grand Vizier to Foreign Ministry highlighted a mass demonstration of approximately 40,000 people in Edirne's Abacilarbasi Square, demanding to stay under Ottoman rule. On July 29th, 1913, this large crowd protested the Bulgarian occupation and celebrated the return of the Ottoman rule.¹⁸ According to the note, the crowd gathered with rousing speeches and much excitement. The report described the sensation among the group to be enthusiastically patriotic (*teheyyüç-ü vatanpervarane*) and boisterously religious (*galeyan-ı hamiyet*). People were jubilantly expressing how grateful they were to have been freed from the 'cruel' Bulgarian rule (*Bulgar idare-i hunharanesi*) and that they were demanding a 'perpetual' (*müebbeden*) Ottoman rule in Edirne. This reference to perpetual Ottoman sovereignty is important, given that the final settlement on Edirne was still not complete. According to the report, demonstrators collectively took an oath to sacrifice all (*her türlü*

¹⁸ August 3, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1974-1-483.

fedakarlık) for this purpose. The meeting disbursed after a press release (*miting mukarreratı*) and a declaration attesting to their demand for Ottoman rule and a copy of this declaration was sent to the Palace as well as the local Ottoman administration and the military commanders.

This note about the Abacılarbasi Square demonstration did not only report the incident but also came up with concrete suggestions. Arguing that the demonstrators showed ‘unity’ (*ittihad*) irrespective of their religious, sectarian, professional or national identity (*din, mezhep, meslek ve millet farkı gözetmeden*), the report, based on the governor of Edirne’s input, suggested to leverage this for a political purpose (*teşebbüsât-i siyasiye*). In more concrete terms, it asked the Foreign Ministry to disseminate this information to the foreign press through the Ottoman missions abroad. This explicit order to the Foreign Ministry shows how influencing the European public opinion (*Avrupa efkar-ı umumiyesi*) mattered to the Ottoman officials in the final settlement of the status of Edirne.

The reported demonstrations and meetings of locals in favor of Ottoman rule included a significant case from Midye. An Army inspector’s report on July 29-30th, 1913 described in detail the Christian population of Midye demonstrating in the streets on a Sunday afternoon.¹⁹ According to the report, about 2000 inhabitants took to the streets after church with Ottoman flags and chanting Ottoman anthems. Demonstrators gave rousing speeches demanding to live under the Ottoman rule. This demonstration was

¹⁹ July 29-30, 1913. BLH 146-107-1-5.

again referred to in a separate communication, where the minutes of the Midye demonstration as well as the petitions sent by the people and religious leaders of Sofulu were shared with the Foreign and Interior Ministries. It is conceivable to think that demonstrations and petitions by these communities could provide more legitimacy in favor of the Ottoman rule.

Another similar appeal by the non-Muslim community for Ottoman rule came from Kirkkilise. Religious leaders (*reis-i ruhani*), thus self-described legitimate representatives (*vekil-i meşuası*), in the recaptured town sent a telegram to the Ottoman government.²⁰ Unsure about the formal status of the town, petitioners declared that they would have no hope for their future (*istikbalimiz naümid*) if the city was turned over to Bulgarians under a final settlement. In the telegram, the local leaders highlighted that the majority of the town (*ekseriyet-i azamisi*) was Greek, and that they would detest living under ‘uncivilized’ (*medeniyetten ari*) Bulgarians. Reaching out to the central government in this fashion, the Greek-majority town clearly publicized their unease with a possible Bulgarian rule.

This statement from the local leaders was undoubtedly perceived to be useful information by the Ottoman bureaucrats and government officials in the fight for favorable European public opinion and the negotiations for the final status of the city. Another report sent from Kirkkilise by a local commander of the occupying Ottoman army to the military headquarters and the government shows this interpretation very

²⁰ August 11, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-2/4.

clearly.²¹ The commander wrote that people from various communities (*millel-i muhtelif mensub*), ranging between five to sixty-year-olds, gathered to declare that they were ready to defend their own city in trenches and they did not want to give up their mainland (*vatan-ı asli*) to the ‘savage’ Bulgarians (*hunhar Bulgarlar*). He reiterated that these locals were ready to defend their land, even at the expense of their blood and life (*kan ve canları*). From the perspective of this local commander, he was observing a very loyal citizenry ready to defend their own land rejecting the Bulgarian rule they endured.

Influencing the international opinion

After the Ottomans regained control of Edirne in late July, the information coming from various Ottoman missions tried to inform the Ottoman government about other governments’ stand on Edirne’s recapture and the local public opinion abroad. At times, these cables from abroad described these outreach attempts to local diplomats and local press to influence the public opinion.

There are various examples of this form of communication between the Ottoman missions. One example of this comes from the embassy in Athens, in which the ambassador described his conversations with Venizelos, the Prime Minister of Greece. He pointed out that Venizelos was sympathetic to the idea of Edirne under Ottoman control.²² The ambassador also mentioned that the Prime Minister cautioned about Ottoman military advances further west of Meric. Except for this cautionary point, the

²¹ August 8, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-102.

²² August 23, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-110.

ambassador relayed that the Greek government preferred both Edirne and the local Greek population to stay under Ottoman sovereignty. Arguably, this was another manifestation of the ongoing rivalry between newly independent states of Greece and Bulgaria rather than an affinity for Ottoman rule.

Ottoman mission in Vienna also provided a cautionary report as well.²³ A senior Austrian diplomat raised concern about the rumors of Ottoman stubborn breach (*işgal-i musırrane*) of this line to occupy Kircaali. The report noted that this rumor, if it was true, would create an unfavorable outcome for the Ottomans. Even though the Ottoman ambassador denied this rumor and tried to reassure his counterpart, the Austrian diplomat, possibly to raise real alarm, implied that the Russian navy was leaving Odessa for an unidentified destination – suggesting a warning sign.

Some of the communications from these missions were aimed to measure the impact of Edirne's occupation by the Ottomans. After the recapture the Ottomans started to observe the potential responses abroad. A report from the Bucharest embassy, for instance, portrayed the Bulgarian army as demoralized and weak (*kuvve-i manevisi fevkalade bozuk ve yorgun*), thus implying no serious resistance from the Bulgarian army.²⁴

The Ottoman bureaucrats were also keen on providing reports on the local coverage of the news on Edirne. A document provides a translation of an article from a Serbian

²³ August 27, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-162.

²⁴ August 10, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-33.

newspaper, *Stampa*, on the recapture of Edirne (*Edirnenin istirdadı keyfiyetine dair*).²⁵ They were even actively involved in influencing the local press coverage. In another cable, the New York consulate was describing an incident of ‘fake news’ (*havadis-i kazibe*) disparaging the Ottomans in the New York World newspaper and how they pursued for the printing of a correction (*tekzib*).²⁶

Following foreign newspapers and communicating with foreign diplomats gave the bureaucrats a way to measure the favorability of the public opinion about Edirne’s takeover. A note from Paris ambassador, for instance, explicitly talked about a higher probability for the eventual retention of Edirne and Kirkkilise.²⁷ Outside of Europe, on the other hand, they came across with more explicit support, especially among the Muslim communities. One example of this came from Ethiopia, where the local Muslim community expressed pleasure in the recapture of Edirne during the festivities in the Ottoman Embassy on a religious holiday.²⁸

There is even more enthusiasm reported by the consulate in Bombay.²⁹ The Ottoman consul described the enthusiastic (*coşkulu*) demonstrations that took place, celebrating the recapture of Edirne, with his explicit support (*teşvik*). Indian Muslims organized festivities around the news of the event and declared their affinity (*meyil ve*

²⁵ August 17, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-43.

²⁶ August 1, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-67.

²⁷ August 18, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-56/57.

²⁸ July 26, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-61/63.

²⁹ August 25, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-133.

muhabbetlerini) to the Ottoman State and the Caliphate. The consul also reported that this and other demonstrations in various Muslim communities around India (*bilad-ı islamiye-i hind*) called for their colonial government, the British, to get involved in resolving the issue of Edirne in favor of Ottomans or at least stay neutral.

The documentation of the alleged atrocities and the physical destruction in the territory retaken by the Ottomans, as well as these demonstrations and petitions, were also utilized for the final negotiation of the status of the city. The Ottomans sent a delegation of government officials called Edirne Committee, headed by Resit Saffet Bey, to European capitals to publicize their case and promote a final settlement in which the Ottoman Empire would keep Edirne. This committee heavily used the collected eyewitness accounts and other records of the Bulgarian atrocities during the occupation. They travelled to London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, and Rome, aiming to make the case for intervention due to these acts of violence against Muslims as well as Greeks that were happening beyond the Midye-Enez line.

The Ottoman Foreign Ministry was obviously concerned about the possible reactions of allies of the Bulgarians, namely Russia. Hence, a group of members from Edirne Committee also visited St. Petersburg at the time. The ambassador to St. Petersburg, Turhan Pasha tried to engage with his Russian counterparts to understand their thinking and asked for a meeting with the Foreign minister. He reported that the Committee expressed the case of the Ottomans to a senior officer at the Russian Foreign Ministry.³⁰

³⁰ August 20, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-71.

The senior officer expressed intent to relay this to the Minister. They had also submitted a version of the declaration they have given in Vienna and reached out to the local press.

Resit Saffet Bey, on the other hand, was traveling in European capitals. When he landed in London in mid-August, most members of the parliament were on summer recess, so he reported his intent to leave early.³¹ His report alluded to a set of documents and photography that was missing and pleaded with the Interior Ministry to expedite and make them available by the time they moved to Paris. These documents and photographs might be related to the deliberate efforts described above. Nevertheless, he was able to request a meeting with a senior officer to explain the Ottoman case.

Resit Saffet Bey had more favorable impressions from their visit to Rome.³² He communicated to Interior Minister Talat Bey that he talked to the Foreign Minister of Italy himself (*bizzat*). The minister told him that if Ottomans established friendly relations (*münasebat-ı kaviyye ve dostane*) with Bulgarians as a compromise, the issue of Edirne could be resolved in favor (*lehine hal ve tesviye*) of the Ottomans. In return for his pleasant experience, he thanked for the helpful policy (*muavenet-i siyasi*) of the Italian government and their friendship (*mezaharet-i dostane*). Resit Saffet Bey even visited the provincial and local government officials in Rome and left with extraordinary good (*fevkalade parlak*) impressions.

³¹ August 18, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-59.

³² September 3, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-307.

In a note to the Foreign Ministry in early September, Ambassador to Rome Mehmet Nabi Bey reported on the visit of the Edirne Heyeti as well, describing the official celebrations at the embassy, and emphasizing the attendance of the Italian political and bureaucratic elite (*mehafil-i siyasiye*) as well as the members of the press (*alem-i matbuat*).³³ He added that long articles appeared in local press (*matbuat-ı mahalliye*) on Ottomans' long-established and regained rights (*hukuk-u muktesebemiz*) on Edirne. This was a great opportunity to promote Edirne's inherent ties (*rabıta-ı lahey*) to its Ottoman homeland and the 'just' Ottoman cause and denounce Bulgarian 'horrors' towards innocent Ottoman civilians and prisoners of war (*bigünah ve masum ahali ve üsera-ı Osmaniye*).

The note is embellished by self-congratulatory comments about the victorious Ottoman army that retook Edirne. The ambassador acknowledged the destruction (*ziyat-ı külliye*) experienced by the Ottoman army during the long and 'insufferable' (*uzun ve tahammülfersah*) Balkan Wars, with the loss of much of the European territories of the Ottoman Empire, but he emphasized the greatness of the Ottoman nation (*millet-i Osmaniye*) and celebrated the retaking of Edirne through the great sacrifices (*büyük fedakarlıklar*) this noble nation endured, which was a testament to its eternal strength (*hayat-ı cavidane*). Hence, he was keen on celebrating at every occasion the regaining of the city and its final inclusion within the Ottoman borderlands.

³³ September 4, 1913. BOA HR SYS 1975-1-244/245.

These deliberate efforts of the Ottoman bureaucracy to influence the international public opinion paid off, and in September of 1913, after the conclusion of the peace treaty negotiations in Istanbul, Edirne stayed under Ottoman control. The border determined a century ago this way still forms the western border of modern-day Turkey with its neighbors.

The Ottoman public welcomed the retaking of this urban center. Eyal Ginio highlights this in his book, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat*, while analyzing many facets of the Balkan War experience of the Ottomans.³⁴ He remarkably illustrates how Edirne became *cause celebre* at the aftermath of the first Balkan War, and that the regaining of the city invigorated many at the face of the tremendous defeat and loss of territory.

In this paper, I emphasized the importance of regaining Edirne amongst the Ottoman military as well as the foreign ministry personnel. Based on the reports of Ottoman civilian officials and military officers from the Ottoman Foreign Ministry and Balkan Wars archives, I demonstrate how the military and the bureaucratic elite negotiated these borderlands spaces and managed to shift lines drawn by the European powers. Edirne remained significant as a contested space in this ongoing process during the First World War and the War of Independence when Edirne was occupied this time, by the Greek army.

³⁴ Eyal Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat: The Balkan Wars and Their Aftermath*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

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