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Multilingualism of Edirne during the 19th century in the Ottoman era

Every community had to use and teach its own language in the Ottoman time in Turkey. Especially in the cities such as Istanbul, Thessalonica and Edirne (Adrianopel) a lot of people lived in a linguistically diverse environment, Jews, Armenian, Greek and Bulgarian communities in due time opening their own schools. Especially Edirne profiled itself as a cosmopolitan city in this respect in the Ottoman time. Bulgarian and Polish people migrated to the district of Edirne for the first time in the 19th century and established twelve schools in Edirne. One of these schools was a catholic one, founded by the Polish Resurrectionists. The multi-ethnicity of Edirne had a huge impact on the linguistic diversity of the inhabitants of the city, which was caused by the Ottoman migration policy throughout the centuries. In the era of Suleyman the Magnificent a lot of handicraftsmen of Armenian origin were invited to Edirne in order to live in the city and strengthen its economy. A number of Jews came to Edirne after their exodus from Spain and Portugal in 1492 and 1495. This paper explores the effects of multilingualism on the economic and social life of Edirne in the 19th century.

Key words: Edirne; ethnic diversity; minority schools; 19th century; non-Muslims.

1. The Ethnic diversity of Edirne in the 19th century

Under the Ottoman reign after 1361 Edirne became a cosmopolitan city as a result of various wars and the state policy as well. Greek people lived there since ancient times, whereas Armenians settled there following the Turkish conquest.



Especially in the era of Suleyman the Magnificent and Selim the Second the state settled Armenians able to do handiwork from the Eastern part of Turkey to Istanbul and Edirne (Oral 1998:7). Jews started to settle in large number after their exodus from Spain and Portugal in the era of Beyazıt the Second. They settled in the cities such as Thessalonica and Edirne. The second big Jewish migration wave occurred after the conquest of Buda in Hungary. As a result of Jewish support in conquering Buda the Turkish Sultan invited Hungarian Jews to Edirne to settle there and freed them from paying taxes to the state. As will be indicated below, Bulgarians who lived in the province of Edirne were not native people of this district. They came to Edirne in order to work as peasants in the land farms around the city in the 19th century. Bulgarian population grew here in time and founded its own community schools (Bali 1998 and Oral 2005).

Table 1. The ethnic diversity of Edirne.

Nations	Years			
	1858 ¹	1882 ²	1911	1918
Turks/Muslims	35,000	20,000	25,000	47,289
Greeks	45,000	25,000	25,950	19,608
Armenians	5,000	6,000	3,500	4,005
Jews	4,000	15,000	9,500	14,466
Bulgarian	5,000	8,000	1,504	2,324 ³
Total	94,000	74,000	65,454	87,692

Source: (Balta 1998: 231).

While 35,000 Turks lived in Edirne in 1858, there was the total of 59,000 non-Muslims in the city. Hence, there were twice as many non-Muslims than Muslims. In 1882 the total population of Edirne reduced to 74,000. Considered that only 20,000 were Muslims, Non-Muslims prevailed in number (see Table 1), which was caused by the Ottoman defeat in the Turkish-Russian War of 1877/78. In the aftermath of this war a lot of Turks left Edirne and migrated to other cities in central Turkey. In this context it must be stressed that the popula-

¹ The data regarding this year were estimated by the Consul K. Phoibos of Greece.

² These figures based on the data of the report (17 January 1882) from the French Consul Gustave Laffon to the foreign minister Leon Gambetta in Paris. Apart from above mentioned five ethnic groups there were approximately 2,000 Roma from Bohemia in the city. As foreigners there were indicated totally 40 people. If we add all these people to the total population of Edirne the population of the city amounts to 76,000 (Balta 1998: 246).

³ According to a decree of the Sultan that was issued in 1898 for approving of a Bulgarian school, in Edirne there lived 2,715 Bulgarians in 623 households.



tion of Turks in Edirne did not grow enough in the eve of the Balkan wars. The Turks of Edirne were for the first time in 1918 in majority (47,289), as compared to the Christian population in the city. In that time the number of Christians (40,403) was nearly equal to that of Turks. The reason why the total population of Turks and Jews increased very rapidly in 1918 was the total loss of European lands of the empire through the Balkan wars as well as the First World War. In particular the Jewish community of Thessalonica came to Edirne in order to settle there after the lost of this city by the Turks.

Greeks were the most numerous ethnic group in Edirne until 1911 compared to other communities. However, they became the second largest group after the Turks in 1918 (see Table 1). In 1858 there were 5,000 Bulgarians in Edirne, their number grew to 8,000 in 1882. In the eve of Balkan wars this figure decreased rapidly to 1,504. The major reason for this was the gaining of full independence of Bulgarian Principedom from the Ottoman Empire in 1908. The Bulgarian population of Edirne was in 1858 equal to that of Armenians, and their total figure in 1882 was lower than that of Armenians (see Table 1). The total population of Edirne was 94,000 in 1858, which went gradually down to 65,454 in 1911.

2. The minority schools of Edirne

Non-Muslims of Edirne educated their children in their own schools that were founded in accordance with the millet-system, as in other cities of the Empire. Among these schools there were the schools of "Alliance Israelite Universelle," which was founded in 1860 in Paris, aiming to protect the rights of Jews in the whole world. In the schools of Alliance pupils were educated in French. Therefore they were preferred by the elite of the Ottoman Empire as well. Some Jewish groups criticized these schools because they contribute towards strengthening the influence of the French culture rather than the Jewish one (Rodrigue 1990: 75).

If we take into consideration that these schools existed in countries such as Iran, Lebanon, Tunis and Syria for a long time after the First World War, it is easy to see that these schools were founded in order to influence the elites of these countries. So the main aim of these schools was not only to educate Jewish children. In this context it must be stressed that Baron Maurice de Hirsch financed the schools of Alliance generously. He granted these schools one billion



gold francs in 1874 and ten billions gold francs in 1889. Alliance owned 71 schools for boys and 44 schools for girls in Turkey in 1912 (Türk 2007; Aron 1990; Encyclopaedia Judaica 1971). Alliance founded its first school in Edirne and Palestine in 1867. There were totally 1,830 pupils in seven Jews schools in Edirne in 1892. 694 out of them visited Alliance school, in which 452 boys and 242 girls were educated. Considering that each school had approximately 261 pupils, it is evident that Alliance schools played an important role for the Jewish community of Edirne. Apart from 1885, the number of pupils in this school grew steadily. According to Bali, the number of pupils in the Alliance school of Edirne was as follows: 516 in 1879, 506 in 1885, 694 in 1891, 852 in 1898 and 1,657 in 1908 (Bali 1998: 217; Oral 2005: 35; Oral 1998: 51).

The grammar schools that belonged to the Greek community were also very famous. The pupils who attended these schools could continue their studies at the University of Athens, and they could even study further in Paris (Kazancıgil, Gökçe and Bilar 2006: 160).

Table 2. Comparison of Minority Schools in Edirne.⁴

Nations	The number of schools	The number of pupils		The total number of pupils	Population ⁵
		Male	Female		
Greeks	16	1,103	1,528	2,631	28,953
Armenians	6	264	260	524	3,782
Jews	7	1,100	730	1,830	9,002
Bulgarians	12	339	347	686	9,806
Total	41	2,806	2,865	5,671	51,543

Source. (Kazancıgil, Gökçe and Bilar 2006).

Regarding the total number of pupils, among the minority schools the Greek community ranked first with sixteen schools (2,631 pupils), followed by the Jewish community with seven schools (1,830). In the third place Bulgarians had

⁴ Beside the schools of these communities there were in Edirne also schools which were founded by the European foreigners. One of these schools was e. g. St Héléne elementary girl school that was founded by the Austrian *Charité d'Agram* nuns.

⁵ These data are based on the annals of Edirne from 1894-95. According to these annals there lived 55,073 Muslims in Edirne. Beside that there were 643 Catholics, 70 Protestants and 4 Latin in the city. With all these ethnic groups the total population of Edirne amounted to 107,333 (Balta 1998: 240).



12 schools (686). In the fourth place came the Armenians with 6 schools (524 pupils) (see Table 2). One cannot appreciate the quality of the schools of the Christian and Jewish communities of Edirne just by considering the numbers of schools and pupils. If one relates the figures of pupils to the population of each community it is easy to see the whole picture. Although the Greek community was the strongest regarding the figure of schools and pupils, when compared to the number of population they occupy the third place with 9%. Bulgarians had twelve schools in the city. They had the last place with 6.9% among the non-Muslim communities. The Jewish community comes in first with 20.3 percent. This means Jews had a high degree of education compared with the other communities in Edirne. Following Jews, Armenians occupied the second place with 13.8 per cent. By Greek and Bulgarian communities girls were in majority, whereas by the Armenians and Jews vice versa.

Among the twelve Bulgarian schools in Edirne, one was a private Catholic school, which had the total of 113 pupils in 1892. Due to the fact that each Protestant Bulgarian school in Edirne had approximately 52 pupils, it follows that the Catholic Bulgarian school had twice as many pupils as the other schools.

3. Conclusion

Edirne was a multi-ethnic city throughout the Ottoman history. In 19th century Bulgarians appeared around Edirne as the most recent ethnic group. As mentioned above, there were four major ethnic groups, including Greeks, Armenians, Jews and Bulgarians, living in peaceful coexistence in Edirne for centuries. Because of the millet-system there were no tensions between the ethnic groups, nor had these groups come into conflict with the Ottoman administration in the city. Each community exercised their rights to speak their own language, to practice their own religion, and to improve their culture.

Despite the multilingual structure of Edirne there was a peaceful coexistence in the city. Armenians, Greeks and Jews contributed to the revival of trade in and around Edirne. Armenians in particular were mostly handicraftsmen who settled after the conquest of the Istanbul. The Turkish-Russian wars in the 19th century, and especially the Balkan wars in 1912-13, changed the demographic situation in the city enormously. In the aftermath of these wars the city lost its non-Muslim inhabitants. Following the foundation of the Turkish republic in 1923 Turkish and Greek governments regulated a population exchange, through



which the Greek people of Edirne emigrated to Greece. In 1930s, a language campaign was launched under the motto “citizen speak Turkish” that affected the non-Muslim population of Edirne so that a lot of Jews migrated to other countries. The second wave of Jewish emigration from Edirne occurred after the foundation of state of Israel in 1948 so that nowadays there are only three persons of Jewish origin in Edirne. The nationalistic policy of Turkish state in the decades following the foundation of republic contributed to the loss of the ethnic diversity of Edirne.

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VIŠEJEZIČNOST U EDIRNEU U 19. STOLJEĆU ZA VRIJEME OTOMANSKE ERE

Svaka je zajednica morala koristiti i poučavati svoj jezik u otomansko vrijeme u Turskoj. Posebno u gradovima poput Istanbula, Thessalonikija i Edirnea (Adrianopol) puno je ljudi živjelo u lingvistički raznorodnim zajednicama, u kojima su Židovi, Armenci, Grci i Bugari otvarali svoje škole. Posebno se Edirne profilirao kao kozmopolitski grad u otomansko vrijeme. Bugari i Poljaci migrirali su u Edirne po prvi puta u 19. stoljeću i tamo osnovali dvanaest škola. Jedna od njih bila je katolička, koju su osnovali poljski rezurekcionisti. Multi-etničnost Edirnea imala je snažan utjecaj na lingvističku raznolikost stanovnika grada, koja je bila rezultat višestoljetne otomanske politike migracija. Za vrijeme Sulejmana Veličanstvenog puno je zanatlija armenskog porijekla pozvano u Edirne da ojačaju njegovu gospodarsku snagu. Određen broj Židova doselio je u Edirne nakon egzodusa iz Španjolske i Portugala 1492. i 1495. U radu se istražuju učinci višejezičnosti na gospodarski i društveni život Edirnea u 19. stoljeću.

Ključne riječi: Edirne; etnička raznolikost; manjinske škole; 19. stoljeće; ne-muslimansko stanovništvo.