*Harun Tuncer*
**UNIVERSITY OF ISTANBUL, INSTITUTE OF TURCOLOGY - TÜRKİYE**

http://hdl.handle.net/2067/49296

# "NEWS IN PAPERS ARE NOT THAT MUCH CREDIBLE!" ABDULHAMID I AND THE EFFORTS TO FOLLOW THE EUROPEAN PRESS

**ABSTRACT**
It is a well-known fact that the advent of the printing press, and therefore the periodic and non-periodical publishing in the Ottoman society took place relatively late compared to its European counterparts. It was thought that this delay meant that the Ottomans were incapable of using the media tools of the period, either actively or passively. In this context, it was assumed that the Ottomans followed not the European press and showed no tendency to use papers as a source of "intelligence" until 1884, when Sultan Abdulhamid II established the Directorate of Foreign Affairs. Contrary to this common belief, despite the few and trivial efforts beforehand, it is seen that Sultan Abdulhamid I (1774-1789) made a consistent and careful effort to follow the European press during his reign. In this article, the sultan's pursuit of the European press, how the papers were procured, what kind of issues were underlined in the extracts translated and how the relevant news and comments were evaluated will be emphasized, and how this effort turned into almost a standard practice following his reign will be shown.

**KEYWORDS:** Abdulhamid I; Newspaper; European Press; Directorate of Foreign Affairs; Intelligence.

## INTRODUCTION

Today, printed newspapers are dying and Turkish society is freed from the stigma of "not reading newspapers"! Actually, the fact that the Turkish ruling elite and the public do not read newspapers has long been the subject of criticism by the Europeans. During the reign of Mahmud II, when *Frankfurter* made fun of the Turks "starting from the statesmen down to the sultan", probably one of the officers in Foreign Ministry made an offer to the sultan saying, «Let's send a note to the journalist so that he does not write such a thing again». The determination of the aforementioned officer regarding the established opinions about the Ottomans was also remarkable: «Until this time, believing that the Ottomans do not read papers, they write whatever they want and tear apart the state's reputation». However, what he said after this determination was of a nature that would shake the general opinion about the Ottomans: «Our Grand Seigneur, the Sultan, reviews all the papers and reads the articles regarding his empire».

European diplomats serving in the Turkish Empire in the early modern period followed the newspapers published in capitals such as Vienna, Paris and London[1],

1 Antoine Galland, *İstanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar*, vol. I (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1949), 49, 173, 183.

and also delivered the intelligence they gathered from Istanbul to their countries[2]. We know that they had contributed to the flux of information. But know not that the Ottoman ministers of state or sultans had such a practice[3]. Even though the Ottoman sultans did not resort to publishing papers in their own land until the middle of the 19th century, and even if they did not "order" even the foreign elements inside to publish newspapers in Istanbul for various reasons, they seemed to have understood early on that papers could be considered as a tool for intelligence. As can be understood from the sentences quoted above, there was a widespread belief in Europe that the Ottomans did not read newspapers for a long time[4]; but it seems that there were individual cases that would shake this stereotype. For example, although it was not consistently maintained, it was seen that the «news seen in the papers from Frengistan»[5] was translated and presented to the sultan during the reign of Sultan Mahmud I (reign 1730-54). Over time, the situation seemed to have changed somewhat. According to the documents come across in the Ottoman Archives, Sultan Abdulhamid I made a serious and consistent effort to follow the European press, unlike his predecessors.



## RUSSIAN THREAT

Sultan Abdulhamid I, whose first move was to accept the independence of Crimea when he came to the throne, saw Russia as his biggest enemy because of the annexation of Crimea by the Russians (1783). Austria was another country that the Sultan always kept an eye on, often due to its alliance with Russia. As a result, he was meticulous and uneasy for getting news about the activities and alliances of these two bordering powers.

Abdulhamid I was in a remarkable effort to obtain information about Europe in general, especially those two aforementioned, by various means and methods. In the regions bordering those two powers in the eastern and western parts[6] the Sultan was giving strict and frequent warnings, directly and indirectly, to the regional administrators[7] private spies[8] about making uninterrupted investigations and sending intelligence on gradual grounds[9]. It was also a fact, especially from the

2 John-Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 94-102.

3 In Sarıcaoğlu's (1999: 96) work, it is also mentioned that there were "summaries of papers" among the files submitted to Abdulhamid I. But, for example, when the practice began, how long this practice lasted, how those were evaluated is not mentioned.

4 BOA, TS.MA.e 560/76.

5 BOA, C.HR 55/2737.

6 Ahmet Yüksel, *Rusların Kafkasya'yı İstilası ve Osmanlı İstihbarat Ağı* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2014), 72-3

7 BOA, AE.SABH.I 19/1668; BOA, AE.SABH.I 16/1430.

8 BOA, A.DVN.DVE 179/110.

9 Yüksel, *Osmanlı İstihbarat Ağı*, 63-4, 67.

countries bordering Austria and Russia, it was difficult to «provide reliable spies» because it was impossible to find capable ones "knowing foreign languages" among the Muslims. It was not «permissible to trust» Jews and Christians[10]. Therefore, papers that also contained international political and military news could be a significant element as an intelligence source. As a matter of fact, due to the reason just articulated, Mehmed Pasha (guardian of Belgrade), for example, stated that he would take the "papers (*kağıt*) called newspapers" and have them translated and forwarded to the grand vizier.

## INTELLIGENCE AND THE PAPERS

Basically, intelligence is an activity of "security". Being safe is a subjective fact/perception for the state as well as for individuals. Knowing the historical areas of conflict and the perpetrators thereof, the Turkish Empire reflexively tried to gather information about the capabilities and equipment of the (opponent) state/s that it considers a potential threat, while on the other hand, struggled hard to restrict the access to information about itself as much as possible. Undoubtedly, intelligence is a method of obtaining information that all states, large or small, apply not only outside the homeland, but also within the country in order to maintain their existence. Starting from the very first conquests, the Ottomans also engaged in an irregular in earlier times, and then a systematic intelligence activity beginning from the 16th century, and these efforts continued until the collapse of the Empire[11]. It is generally accepted that intelligence activities are grouped under two headings, in accordance with their subject/types and their levels. It can be claimed that the information obtained through newspapers is political and military in terms of type and strategic, in terms of level. As a matter of fact, newspapers, which take the pulse of the society they are a product of, are information sources that can provide political and military news of an "intelligent"[12] quality in proportion to the proximity of the editorial team to intelligence sources, as well as a mass media tool[13]. Although it is said that newspapers were a direct tool of intelligence in the 19th and 20th centuries[14], as it is understood from the example given in this article and the attitude of the ruling elites, papers are politically active and has long been used as a military manipulation tool.

Journalism in Europe started quite early compared to the Ottoman Empire. Austria, Prussia, Venice and England were the leading figures in this sense. The first papers



10 BOA, HAT 1416/57870.

11 Haldun Eroğlu, "Klasik Dönemde Osmanlı Devleti'nin İstihbarat Stratejileri", *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 22/34 (2003): 22-33.

12 James Grant, *The Newspaper Press; Its Origin, Progres and Present Position* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1871), 9-10.

13 Donald W. Whisenhunt, "The Frontier Newspaper: A Guide to Society and Culture", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 45/4 (1968): 726; Robert Ezra Park, "Natural History of Newspapers", *American Journal of Sociology*, 29/3 (1923): 276.

14 Von Klevitsch, *İstihbarat*, trans. Mustafa Şevki (Istanbul: Askerî Akademiler Matbaası, 1927): 10-1.

were prepared by hand, not by print, and had limited circulation, for sure. With the loosening of the political tension in the second half of the 17th century, journalism began in the significant centers of Europe in a format close to today's standards[15]. For the Ottomans, the main factor in the publication of the first public paper was the concern «to inform the people about the daily events and innovations of the time during an attempt to adopt the methods of Western civilization»[16]. In addition, the state wanted the society, which had difficulty in keeping up with the reforms made one after another, to give credit not to "rumors" but to the news to be publicized from the official mouth through the papers[17]. In other words, the ideal of being a partially independent tool for publishing articles on international politics, as in Western papers, was not in question for the first period of Ottoman journalism. The main concern was to inform the public and especially the civil servants about administrative and some political moves taken by the central government[18].



## SULTAN'S CHANNELS FOR INTELLIGENCE: IS THE NEWS IN PAPERS CAN BE INTELLIGENCE?

The most important sources of intelligence during the classical period of the Empire were the civil and military officials in the frontier regions[19], the Ottoman subjects, non-Muslim clergy, and especially the voivodes of Wallachia and Moldavia[20]. The voivodes mentioned were responsible for collecting the rumors and intelligence circulating among diplomats, especially being aware of what was going on in the eastern Europe and Russia, through their men «in charge of collecting news»[21] and conveying them to the Ottomans. The grand vizier emphasized the importance of this very issue in the document submitted to the Sultan by saying that «gathering news is the only duty of the Moldavian and Wallachian voivodes», on a piece of note sent by the Moldavian voivode, where these activities were directly mentioned[22]. Apart from the intelligence sources mentioned, the Sultan also received news about interstate events from the ambassadors of France, Sweden and Prussia, and did

15 Grant, *The Newspaper Press*, 1-31; Yusuf Ziya, "İngiltere'de Gazeteciliğin Suret-i Tekemmülü", *İctihad*, 26 (1911), 767-69.

16 Cengiz Orhonlu, "Türkçe Yayınlanan İlk Gazete: Takvim-i Vekâyi", *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi*, I/6 (1968): 35.

17 Orhonlu, "İlk Gazete", 36.

18 Orhonlu, "İlk Gazete", 37.

19 Virginia Aksan, "The One-Eyed Fighting the Blind: Mobilization, Supply and Command in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1808", in *Ottomans and Europeans. Contacts and Conflicts*, ed. Ead. (Piscataway: Gorgias Press), 145.

20 *Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Osmanlı'da İstihbarat*, eds. Kemal Gürülkan, Ersin Kırca, Numan Yekeler, et al. (Istanbul: Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2017), 5-6. Mevlüde G. Daş Darici, "Eflak-Boğdan-Erdel Voyvodaları ve Osmanlı İstihbaratına Dair Rolleri", *Stratejik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 3/1, (2019): 87-99; Vedat Kanat, "Osmanlı Devleti'nin Lehistan'a Dair İstihbarat Kaynakları", *Turkish Studies*, 10/13 (2015): 118-21

21 BOA, AE.SABH.I 98/6668.

22 BOA, AE.SABH.I 19/1694.

not hesitate to be fed from almost every source, provided that he was "cautious" in terms of the sources of intelligence[23].

In this context, it was understood that the governor of Bosnia, Abdullah Pasha, had spies in the districts bordering Austria, followed the papers issued in Vienna and sent to the Bosnian lands, and forwarded some of them he deemed important to the Sultan. However, Abdullah Pasha drew attention to the fact that «the news being published in the papers and sent to various places» could also be «one of the tricks that have become the character of the Austrians»[24].

In the aforementioned summary (April 9, 1747) presented to Sultan Mahmud I, with the headline "newspaper news from *Frengistan* (Europe)", it is reported that France will attack Belgium, and that there was consensus that Louis XV should attack Flanders with a "perfectly equipped" army lead by him personally. It was also recorded that the Austro-Sardinian alliance attacked the Genoese, that the Genoese successfully resisted, while it was stated that France and Spain supported the Genoese both by land and by sea. The proximity between Austria and the duke of Cologne was also noted; and lastly, it was mentioned that Carl Gustaf Tessin became the prime minister in Sweden despite the Russian opposition[25].



At the end of the same year, this time there was a newspaper summary presented by the Wallachian voivode through his special agent (*kapıkethüdası)* in the Porte. It was reported that the newspaper favored Austrian policies on the grounds that it was published in Cologne and that Cologne was also subject to Austria at that time, and that it should be taken into account that some of the news given in the papers could be meant to "deceive the Turkish Empire". However, Wallachian voivode Konstantin Mavrokordato[26] stated that similar things had happened in the recent past as well, and that in this context, and that he read this type of a "proper situation" in the *Tarih* authored by Subhi[27].

These two extracts of papers are the earliest dated summaries ever identified. Considering that there was no intense follow-up effort[28] as it was during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid I, and there was no note on the piece belonging to the grand vizier or the Sultan, it can be argued that such an effort remained isolated.

Following Abdulhamid I, Selim III, especially through the permanent ambassadors sent[29], followed the papers published in Europe, and the increase in the number

23 BOA, HAT 1430/58531; BOA, AE.SABH.I 19/1688; BOA, AE.SABH.I 19/1644; BOA, AE.SABH.I 4/412; BOA, AE.SABH.I 19/1689; BOA, AE.SABH.I 9/798; BOA, AE.SABH. I 369/25757; BOA, AE.SABH.I 4/439.

24 HAT 26/1262-D.

25 BOA, C.HR 55/2737.

26 For more about the family, see the entry "Mavrocordato", in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol 17/8, ed. Hugh Chisholm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 917.

27 BOA, C.HR 88/4381.

28 Fikret Sarıcaoğlu, *Sultan I. Abdülhamid. Kendi Kaleminden Bir Padişahın Portresi (1774-1789)* (Istanbul: Tarih ve Tabiat Vakfı Yayınları, 2001), 96.

29 BOA, C.HR 96/4778.

and variety of the papers followed (Frankfurt, Rome, Madrid, Vienna, Strasbourg, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, Flavin, Warsaw) was worth noting[30].
Sultan Abdulhamid I, who seemed to follow the European papers more regularly and steadily, did not consider newspapers only as a military and political source of information, but also followed the social and cultural developments in Europe through them[31]. In this sense, Abdulhamid I wanted attention to be given to the continuity and confirmation of the information given in the notes he took on the intelligence reports delivered to him. Because, as in that period, «intensive, uninterrupted and verified intelligence was of vital importance» in the times of severe conflict both within Europe and around the Ottoman border[32].
Although the first half of the 18th century passed peacefully for the Ottomans, the state was quite worn out due to the struggles with the Russian and Austrian empires in the second half. The colonial empires established by France and England in the Americas, and again by the latter in India, face tough tests; Western empires that won in one place were losing power in another. Russia's efforts to expand towards Central Asia and Asia Minor, as well as its plan to dominate the Black Sea and descend towards the Mediterranean, frequently brought the Ottomans and Russians into conflict towards the end of the century.
Many struggles that ended in defeat in the process paved the way for the Ottomans, who forced to admit that they were weak in the military sense, to embark on diplomatic quests. Towards the end of the century, there was a need to establish residence embassies in Europe and to monitor and report the political and military developments on the spot. However, while the embassies were not yet established by Selim III, Abdulhamid I was trying to follow what was going on in Europe through spies appointed by local administrators and newspapers published in various parts of the continent[33]. Contrary to some claims[34], this pursuit is not just an effort made before the "campaigns"; it was a continuous activity[35].
Considering the 39 pieces of "news summaries" found in the Presidential Ottoman Archive, it was seen that Abdulhamid I had followed the European press since the fifth year of his reign. It was certainly no coincidence that 1/3 of these summaries coincided with the first three years of the war declared against Russia (1787) to recapture the Crimea[36]. In general being good-hearted, mild and pro-peaceful[37]



30 BOA, HAT 144/6063.

31 BOA, TS.MA.e 560/39.

32 Ahmet Yüksel, "II. Mahmud Devrinde Mısır Krizi ve İstihbarat", *Yeni Türkiye*, 83 (2016): 461; Akad, *Tarihten Günümüze*, 20.

33 BOA, TS.MA.e 559/66.

34 Klevitsch, *İstihbarat*, 3.

35 Abdülkadir Özcan, "Casus" (Türk devletlerinde)", *DİA*, 7 (1993): 169.

36 During the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid I, the dates and traditions of newspaper extracts found in the archive were as follows: 2 in 1779; 3 in 1780; 4 in 1781; 2 in 1782; 5 in 1783; 3 in 1784; 2 in 1785; 3 in 1786; 3 in 1787; In the form of 5 separate files in 1788 and 5 separate files in 1789, the news compiled from various newspapers were presented to him by being summarized and translated.

37 Midhat Sertoğlu, *Mufassal Osmanlı Tarihi*, vol. V (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu

figure, Abdulhamid I was seeking to maintain the "friendship" or the peaceful relations with other European powers, in the face of the war card played by the grand vizier under public pressure, and to know how the Ottoman-Russian conflict was evaluated in their public and political gatherings.

## "NEWS IN PAPERS ARE NOT THAT MUCH CREDIBLE!"

It was obvious that Abdulhamid I had been following the newspapers for 10 years. In addition, papers were requested to be found in person, rather than being delivered as they were seized[38]. As a matter of fact, the Sultan revealed that he wanted to follow the papers personally, with the mandate he wrote on the summarized piece submitted to him by the grand vizier and others conveyed by the *charge d'affaires* ordering them that they would not refrain from getting intelligence on gradual basis[39]. Considering that the sultan, who worked with a total of nine grand viziers in 15 years, followed the European press for a long time, this should have been a sign of his own interest rather than the ingenuity of any grand vizier employed during his sway.



Despite this, the sultan also knew that newspaper reports would not to be blindly believed, and that the relevant newspapers might be seeking lies, deception, conspiracy and diversion in favor of the states they belonged to. For example, in the news published in the paper *Notizie del Mondo*, which was published in Venice on 3 August 1784 and was translated and presented to the Sultan with the original copy in the middle of the same month[40] it reads,

> The surest way to preserve harmony and friendship with Austria is to let a part of Croatia be annexed by the Emperor. All this was expressed in a very friendly way and had a great impact on the Court. A few days later, Reis Effendi sent a memorandum to the ambassador and said that the Ottoman Empire was not far from showing courtesy to the emperor's request[41].

It was clear that the Ottoman Sultan was forced to make concessions in favor of the Austrians.

In some of these summaries presented to the Sultan, it was recorded to which cities the newspapers belonged and from time to time by whom they were delivered to the palace. It was stated that 15 papers were brought from Austria (Vienna and Cologne), four papers from the Netherlands, two papers from France, another two from Italy and one was brought from Russia.

As the documents show the papers were sometimes sent by the voivodes of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldovia through their official agents in the capital,

---

Yayınları, 2011), 2659

38 BOA, AE.SABH.I 19/1633.

39 BOA, AE.SABH.I 19/1633.

40 BOA, HAT 26/1262.

41 I would like to thank Dr. Canan Parmaksızoğlu Aksoy for her help translating the piece.

sometimes by the pashas serving as the guardians at the borders[42], sometimes by European merchant ships[43], and from time to time by the ambassadors of European powers in Istanbul[44]. The papers brought to the Sublime Porte had by the grand vizier been translated (by the interpreters employed in the Court), then the summarized piece would be presented to the Sultan either as it is or sometimes with the personal notes of the grand vizier written in red ink[45]. One or a few sentences of the sultan's admonition, warning, order or prayer/curse were seen on almost every piece that was presented. For example, in the lines he wrote on the summary, which was submitted to him a few days before his demise (April 7, 1789), he said, «It is my request that you be aware of the correctness of each of the newspaper copies and then submit them to me»[46]. He warned that they should be investigated and that he should be informed of the exact results. On the summary, which was apparently presented to him around the same time, mentioning that Venice had attacked Tunisia, «May Allah, the best of Helpers, damn the heathen both on land and at sea» he wrote[47].



Though rare, it was also mentioned that the papers were translated by someone other than the translators in the Court. In the summary of an Austrian paper, it was reported that the translation was made and delivered by "Osman Bey". The Grand Vizier also showed the relevant translation to the Court translator, who confirmed that the summary was "as shown". Then, the summary file was presented to the sultan together with the original of the paper[48]. Sometimes, it was recorded that at least some translations (of the news) were corrected by «foreign state translators residing in the Capital», that is, by translators working in the embassies, probably in order to be sure of the job made by the translator in the Royal Court[49].

Undoubtedly, Abdulhamid I was not only trying to gather intelligence through those papers; it wouldn't be very healthy either[50]. For example, there was an anonymous article published in a foreign newspaper stating that especially military and political content in the news could not be too much trusted[51]. When the possibility arose for the Austrians to attack the Ottomans again (1788) in alliance with the Russians, it was said in the newspapers that «[...] it is funny not to believe, but to say, that the French had even dreamed of diverting the Austrian Emperor from his purpose, which may have been concealed at the time being».

42 BOA, HAT 1416/57870.

43 BOA, TS.MA.e 560/75.

44 BOA, HAT 23/1105.

45 BOA, AE.SABH.I 12/1052; BOA, AE.SABH.I 370/25835.

46 BOA, HAT 1451/76.

47 BOA, AE.SABH.I 365/25492.

48 BOA, TS.MA.e 559/66.

49 BOA, TS.MA.e 558/58.

50 Grant, *The Newspaper Press*, 28-9.

51 BOA, TS.MA.e 559/18.

Besides, in the face of the claim that Russia did not have the economic and military equipment to fight the Ottomans, the verdict was made that «what is written in other newspaper documents is completely baseless». After all, the grand vizier stated in his memorandums that it would not be right to rely only on the papers, as they were devised as tools for "cheating, as is the custom of European states"; and the Sultan himself appreciated it[52].

While Crimea was still kept by the Russians and there was a preparation for a possible attack against Russia (1785), the grand vizier (Şahin Ali Pasha), who presented the news compiled from several papers during the ongoing seek for alliance, expressed his sensitivity on the subject with the following words:

> […] This type of newspaper report is too unreliable; unless it turned out that it appeared time and again, or it was confirmed from other sources/places, or seemed to be compatible with the conditions and interests of the period. Then it is worth to be trusted.



Thus he put forward three conditions for paper reports to be considered credible: 1. News should have been written at least a few times; 2. It would have to be confirmed by other news sources/channels; 3. It should have seemed appropriate for the time and interest.

The use of newspapers by governments to create public opinion against their rivals and to attract the public for political moves[53] was not unique to the 19th and 20th centuries. It was understood from a report sent to Abdulhamid I that papers were used as a propaganda tool in the 18th century. After Russia announced through papers that it was making some plans considering Iran, Suleyman Pasha (guardian of Baghdad and Basra) was asked to investigate the situation and to confirm whether the news in the paper had anything to do with the facts[54]. It is written in the Austrian newspapers that «Ottoman Empire may give up Belgrade besides the sacrifices made for the continuation of peace with Russia». The two states, which frequently formed alliances against the Ottomans on this ground, were trying to discourage the Ottomans from their determination to fight through the news they spread as "rumors"[55].

Sultan Abdulhamid I was not merely seeking outward intelligence; and also, for example, was trying to get information about the situation of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Aegean Islands, and to be informed about the situation of the people and the treatment of the local government towards the people living in his empire. In this context, a report on nine districts in the region was presented by a man he sent to the Mediterranean islands in March 1784[56].

---

52 BOA, AE.SABH.I 12/1052; BOA, TS.MA.e 560/46.

53 Zekeriya Kurşun, "II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Batı Basınında İmaj Düzeltme Çabaları: Matbuat-ı Ecnebiye Müdüriyeti'nin Kurulması ve Faaliyetleri", *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 1 (1999): 105.

54 BOA, HAT 10/348.

55 BOA, HAT 1430/58526.

56 BOA, TS.MA.e, 706/27.

## COUNTRIES MENTIONED IN THE NEWS: RUSSIA, AUSTRIA…

The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji), which was signed following the war against the Russians, which started in 1768 and lasted for about 6 years, in order to prevent the first partition of Poland between Russia, Prussia and Austria, resulted in heavy conditions in both material and moral terms[57]. Then, between 1776-79, the wars with Iran due to the invasion of Basra also hit a hard blow militarily and economically.

After the loss of Crimea in 1774, the Ottomans tried to take it back for the coming 10 years. In 1777, Şahin Giray was proclaimed khan with the support of the Russian Tsarina. He eliminated his rivals and dominated the whole of Crimea[58]. In 1783, without much resistance, Crimea was annexed by the Russians. Although the situation was traumatic, the Ottomans had to recognize the annexation about a year later, in 1784.



In the following process, the Russian Tsarina Catherine II imposed clauses on Wallachia and Moldavia, which led her to obtain the right to intervene. In addition to the dismissal and appointment of the Wallachian and Moldavian voivodes, she began to actively interfere with the governors of the surrounding provinces, and to apply pressure for some of them to be dismissed and others to be replaced through the embassy. Not satisfied with that, the Tsarina[59] signed a plan to divide Turkey, called the *Projet Grec* (Greek Project), with the Austrian Emperor Joseph II[60].

In this conjuncture, the country that was the object of the summaries presented to Abdulhamid I was, as could be expected, Russia. As the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, signed in 1774 after a 6-year wearisome fight, «made Russia the most important force dominating the Ottoman destiny, and this situation turned into a nightmare that was getting worse as days passed»[61]. Next came Austria; England and France followed suit.

It was certainly not out of place that the countries mostly mentioned in the summaries were Russia and Austria. The sultan had a kind of antipathy towards the Austrians, especially the Russians, as they frequently threatened the state, and at almost every opportunity cut off the parts/parcels of the Empire that bordered them, and against the British for her colonial activities aimed at the Islamic community in the Indian sub-continent. He seemed particularly angry with England; he was extremely offended by the fact that they were providing naval support to the Russians. As a matter of fact, when the news that the French and Swedish ambassadors conveyed to the chief effigy through their translators was presented to him by the grand vizier, on the relevant memorandum, «How much did the British infidel help the Russians at sea before? God is just; hopefully she

57 İsmail Hami Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, vol. IV (Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1972), 58.

58 Aksan, "The One-Eyed Fighting the Blind", 170.

59 For details of the project, see Edouard Driault, *Napoleon'un Şark Siyaseti*, trans. Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları), 12-37.

60 Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı*, 64-5.

61 Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı*, 58.

(the British) will be defeated», he noted[62]. No matter that the intelligence reports of the French ambassador were presented to him and he was told that she was a «400-year-old friend», Abdulhamid I stated that «the Ottomans should not take heed of such words too much, and that it is necessary to be prepared against the enemy at any moment»[63].

In 1787, the Ottomans could not tolerate the "brazen Russian demands" and, under the pressure of the public, Grand Vizier Koca Yusuf Pasha declared war on Russia[64]. However, things did not go as planned; in the following process, the Ottoman officials seemed to be convinced that the acceptance of the Russian demands would be more reasonable. After the declaration of the war, in April 1879, in the memorandum presented to the sultan himself by the Grand Vizier Koca Yusuf Pasha, «all viziers, *ulema*, headmen and statesmen in the advisory council unanimously agreed to issue the Russians a memorandum» considering the lack of communication in the soldiers of the Empire, the inadequacy of the Treasury and the necessities of the situation. It was understood from the expression[65] that most of the statesmen were not willing to wage a war because of the irregularity of the soldiers and shortage of money[66], and they thought that the Russians should be given the document (sened) they wanted. In addition, it was clear from the magnate that the Sultan was of the opinion that the Empire was not ready for war, and that he wrote to the grand vizier[67]. He also stated that «the condition of the state is well-known, or else it will be worse»; and ordered that the «treasury, soldiers and other castles should be given a good form first».



In 1788, Austria declared war on Turkey taking side with the Russians due to her word of alliance. In the same year, Sweden declared war on the Russians as she was an ally of the Turks. Yet she succeeded nothing other than capturing of a small castle within a few months and withdrew from the war due to the turmoil in the country. In 1788, the Fortress of Ochakov fell, and the Russians, capturing the city, attempted to plunder and killed 25 thousand non-warriors.

For Sultan Abdulhamid I, who was always meticulous to "see supply", this last war seemed to cost a very heavy bill. He had an enthusiastic but not oppressive nature in state administration. In particular, he instructed the grand viziers to take responsibility for their work; did not follow an imposing and oppressive administrative policy. However, due to various faults, incompatibilities and even the illiteracy of some, many grand viziers were able to serve for very short periods of time. This frequent change had prevented the establishment of an atmosphere of peace and security in the administration and the Sultan, and led to the failure to get the desired results from the reforms undertaken in response to the weaknesses experienced.

---

62 BOA, AE.SABH.I 4/412.

63 BOA, AE.SABH.I 15/1312.

64 Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı*, 64.

65 BOA, AE.SABH.I 19/1689.

66 Kazim Şinasi, "On Üçüncü Asırda İstikraz İşleri: Abdülhamid-i Evvel ve Selim-i Salis Zamanı", *Yeni Mecmua*, 42/2 (1918): 311-12.

67 BOA, AE.SABH.I 4/388.

## CONCLUSION

It was very important for Sultan Abdulhamid I to be wary of his close and distant neighbors at a time when the state was engaged in an intense struggle against Russia and Austria, lost land piece by piece by being constantly threatened, on top of that, it experienced economic and military difficulties and attempted reform movements irrespective of all these adverse conditions. Under those unfavorable times, the Sultan, who had to follow a policy of balance, wanted to evaluate all the sources he could get intelligence from. In this direction, papers, which started to become more widespread in Europe, were an important tool.

Apart from the two pieces of summaries, which are stated to belong to the period of Sultan Mahmud I before Sultan Abdulhamid I, no hints appear that European papers were followed regularly by the Turkish sultans. But with this move, which he almost made a habit of, Abdulhamid I created almost a new way. It is understood from the thousands of documents found in various funds in the Ottoman archives that Sultan Selim III, Sultan Mahmud II and Sultan Abdulmecid, who took the throne after him, and undoubtedly Sultan Abdulhamid II[68] continued this very way.



The main political motivation of the Sultan, who was on the throne in between two Russian wars, was to take back the Crimea from the Russians, who took an aggressive stance against the Ottomans in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. In this sense, Abdulhamid did not want to be deprived of the news about the region and neither of the news published in the papers launched in various parts of Europe such as Austria, Netherlands, France and Italy; and stressed upon the flux of intelligence. The relevant intelligence-gathering effort was not limited to Russia, of course. Other political and economic alliances in Europe, military preparations, the heads of state's domestic and international trips, the European public views of the Ottomans and Turkish statesmen, etc. were the headlines highlighted in the summaries presented. As a matter of fact, Abdulhamid I did not hesitate to collect information about his near and distant contemporaries and societies and tended to make the most of this information especially in his political moves.

Along with the interest shown to the newspapers, there was a cautious approach both in the sultan and the grand vizier. Although he insisted on compiling news from the papers, the sultan was advising that it was pointless to trust them with eyes blind and that the news should be confirmed by diplomats and other sources of information.

68 Kurşun, "II. Abdülhamid Döneminde", 101-03.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

BOA: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri-Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi
AE. SABH. I: Ali Emiri Abdülhamid I
TS. MA.e: Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi Evrakı
C.HR: Cevdet Hariciye
HAT: Hatt-ı Hümâyûn
A.DVN.DVE: Düvel-i Ecnebiye Belgeleri

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Akad, Mehmet Tanju. *Tarihten Günümüze İstihbarat* [Intelligence from History to the Present]. Istanbul: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2018.

Aksan, H. Virginia. "The One-Eyed Fighting the Blind: Mobilization, Supply and Command in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1808", in *Ottomans and Europeans. Contacts and Conflicts*, edited by Ead., 141-173. Piscataway: Gorgias Press.

Ali Suavi. "İngiltere" [England], *Ulum*, 15 (1869): 876-877.

Chisholm, Hugh, ed. "Mavrocordato", in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 17/8, 917. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911.

Danişmend, İsmail Hami. *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi* [Annotated Chronology of Ottoman History], vol. IV. Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1972.

Daş Darici, Mevlüde Gökçen. "Eflak- Boğdan-Erdel Voyvodaları ve Osmanlı İstihbaratına Dair Rolleri" [Wallachia-Moldavia-Erdel Voivodes and Their Roles in Ottoman Intelligence]. *Stratejik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 3/1, (2019), 85-99.

Ziya, Yusuf. "İngiltere'de Gazeteciliğin Suret-i Tekemmülü" [The Evolvement of Journalism in England], *İctihad*, 26 (1911), 767-69.

Driault, Édouard. *Napoleon'un Şark Siyaseti* [Napoleon's Oriental Politics], translated by Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2013.

Eroğlu, Haldun. "Klasik Dönemde Osmanlı Devleti'nin İstihbarat Stratejileri" [Intelligence Strategies of the Ottoman Empire in the Classical Period]. *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 22/34 (2003): 11-33.

Galland, Antoine. *İstanbul'a Ait Günlük Hatıralar* [Daily Memories of Istanbul], vol. I. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1949.

Ghobrial, John-Paul. *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Grant, James. *The Newspaper Press; Its Origin, Progres and Present Position*. London: Tinsley Brothers, 1871.

Gürülkan, Kemal, Kırca Ersin, Yekeler Numan, et al., eds. *Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Osmanlı'da İstihbarat* [Intelligence in the Ottoman Empire Based on Archive Documents]. Istanbul: Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2017.

Kanat, Vedat. "Osmanlı Devleti'nin Lehistan'a Dair İstihbarat Kaynakları" [Intelligence Sources of the Ottoman Empire on Poland]. *Turkish Studies*, 10/13 (2015): 113-22.

Şinasi, Kazim. "On Üçüncü Asırda İstikraz İşleri: Abdülhamid-i Evvel ve Selim-i Salis Zamanı" [Loan Affairs in the Thirteenth Century: The Time of Abdülhamid-i

Evvel and Selim-i Salis]. *Yeni Mecmua*, 42/2 (1918): 311-12.
Klevitsch, von. *İstihbarat* [Intelligence], transl. Mustafa Şevki. Istanbul: Askerî Akademiler Matbaası, 1927.
Kurşun, Zekeriya. "II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Batı Basınında İmaj Düzeltme Çabaları: Matbuat-ı Ecnebiye Müdüriyeti'nin Kurulması ve Faaliyetleri" [Image Correction Efforts in the Western Press During the Abdul Hamid II Era: Establishment and Activities of the Press Office]. *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 1 (1999): 105-118.
Orhonlu, Cengiz. "Türkçe Yayınlanan İlk Gazete: Takvim-i Vekâyi" [The First Newspaper Published in Turkish: Takvim-i Vekâyi]. *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi*, I/6 (1968): 35-9.
Özcan, Abdülkadir. "Casus. (Türk devletlerinde)" [Spy (in Turkish states)]. *DİA*, 7 (1993): 166-69.

Park, Robert Ezra. "Natural History of Newspapers". *American Journal of Sociology*, 29/3 (1923): 273-89.
Sarıcaoğlu, Fikret. *Sultan I. Abdülhamid. Kendi Kaleminden Bir Padişahın Portresi (1774-1789)* [Sultan Abdulhamid I. Portrait of a Sultan from his own pen (1774-1789)]. Istanbul: Tarih ve Tabiat Vakfı Yayınları, 2001.
Sertoğlu, Midhat. *Mufassal Osmanlı Tarihi* [Detailed Ottoman History], vol. V. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2011.
Whisenhunt, Donald W. "The Frontier Newspaper: A Guide to Society and Culture". *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 45/4 (1968): 726-28.
Yüksel, Ahmet. *Rusların Kafkasya'yı İstilası ve Osmanlı İstihbarat Ağı* [Russian Invasion of the Caucasus and the Ottoman Intelligence Network]. (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2014).
Yüksel, Ahmet . "II. Mahmud Devrinde Mısır Krizi ve İstihbarat" [Egypt Crisis and Intelligence in the Era of Mahmud II]. *Yeni Türkiye*, 83 (2016): 458-82.

**PRIMARY SOURCES**

BOA, AE.SABH.I 19/1688; 9/1644; 4/412; 19/1689; 9/798; 369/25757; 4/439; 362/25268; 12/1052; 98/6668; 19/1694; 4/412; 15/1312; 19/1633; 4/388; 19/1668; 365/25492; 361/25219; 98/6668; 16/1415; 18/1544; 19/1689
BOA, TS.MA.e 560/39; 560/75; 715/55; 560/41; 706/27; 558/58; 747/68; 559/18; 243/7; 560/76; 560/82
BOA, HAT 10/348; 141/5843; 1416/57870; 14/566; 1430/58531; 23/1105; 26/1262-D, E; 1451/76; 144/6063; 22/1035
BOA, C.HR 88/4381; 96/4778; 55/2737
BOA, A.DVN.DVE 179/110

# VARIA SECTION