

From Empire to Nation-State:
Filibeli Ali Fehmi (1871-1922) and *Muvazene*
Newspaper

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Declaration of Originality

The intellectual content of this thesis, which has been written by me and for which I take full responsibility, is my own, original work, and it has not been previously or concurrently submitted elsewhere for any other examination or degree of higher education. The sources of all paraphrased and quoted materials, concepts, and ideas are fully cited, and the admissible contributions and assistance of others with respect to the conception of the work as well as to linguistic expression are explicitly acknowledged herein.

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Abstract

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This thesis provides the biography of Filibeli Ali Fehmi, a Young Turk from Bulgaria, and examines the first-year issues of his *Muvazene* newspaper. When suspicions arose about Ali Fehmi's connections to the Young Turks, the Ottoman government terminated his official duties, forcing him to return to his hometown of Filibe, where he began publishing *Muvazene* in 1897. After the Russo-Ottoman War (1877-1878), Muslims in Bulgaria, who were former subjects of the Ottoman Empire, had become citizens of the newly emerged Principality of Bulgaria. The Balkan Muslims sought to redefine the future of their community, and the Muslim intellectuals in particular believed that they could achieve a rejuvenation through culture and politics. Ali Fehmi was an active participant who contributed to achieving these goals. This thesis demonstrates how Ali Fehmi's *Muvazene* newspaper engaged with its readers by addressing common problems and publicizing issues of corruption. This study also shows the pivotal role played by Ali Fehmi and his *Muvazene* newspaper in the establishment of the Young Turk ideology in Bulgaria. Without attributing a single identity to Ali Fehmi, this thesis examines how Ali Fehmi was perceived differently by the Young Turks, the Bulgarian government, and the Ottoman government, thereby acquiring a plural and indefinite identity in this context. Ali Fehmi, taking advantage of the relative freedom in Bulgaria, published his newspaper, which led to his surveillance by the Ottoman government via spies and its commissioner in Bulgaria. As a result of the escalating tension between Ali Fehmi and the Ottoman government, he was deported by the Bulgarian government in

1905. Afterward, he resided in Paris, Geneva, Egypt, and Afghanistan. The work also emphasizes that Ali Fehmi dedicated himself to the advancement and progress of Muslims and Turks, first locally and then globally. Most of the primary sources used in this work are the Ottoman Archives and the first-year issues of *Muvazene*. This thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature on the Muslims in Bulgaria in general and the Young Turks in particular.

42.471 words

Özet

İmparatorluktan Ulus Devlete:

Filibeli Ali Fehmi (1871-1922) ve *Muvazene* Gazetesi

Elif Sabah Tüfekçi, Yüksek Lisans Adayı, 2023

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Doktor Öğretim Üyesi Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, Tez Danışmanı

Bu tez, Bulgaristan Jön Türklerinden olan Filibeli Ali Fehmi'nin biyografisini ve *Muvazene* gazetesinin birinci yıl nüshalarını incelemektedir. Ali Fehmi'nin Jön Türk bağlantıları olduğu yönünde şüpheler doğunca Osmanlı hükümeti, Ali Fehmi'nin resmi görevine son vererek memleketi Filibe'ye dönmesine neden oldu ve Ali Fehmi burada 1897'de *Muvazene*'yi yayınlamaya başladı. 1877-1878 Rus-Osmanlı Savaşı'ndan sonra, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun eski tebaası olan Bulgaristan'daki Müslümanlar, yeni kurulan Bulgaristan Prensliği'nin vatandaşı olmuştu. Balkan Müslümanları toplumlarının geleceğini yeniden tanımlamaya çalışırken özellikle de Müslüman entelektüeller kültür ve siyaset yoluyla durumlarının daha iyiye gideceğine inanıyordu. Ali Fehmi, bu hedeflere ulaşılmasına katkıda bulunan entelektüellerdendir. Bu tez, Ali Fehmi'nin yayınladığı *Muvazene* gazetesinin, Bulgaristan'daki Müslümanların ortak sorunları ve yolsuzluk meselelerini ele alarak okurlarıyla nasıl ilişki kurduğunu göstermektedir. Çalışma, aynı zamanda Ali Fehmi ve *Muvazene* gazetesinin Bulgaristan'da Jön Türk ideolojisinin yerleşmesinde oynadığı önemli rolü de göstermektedir. Ali Fehmi'ye tekil bir kimlik atfetmekten kaçınan bu tez, onun Jön Türkler, Bulgar hükümeti ve Osmanlı hükümeti tarafından nasıl farklı algılandığını ve böylece bu bağlamda nasıl çoğul ve belirsiz bir kimlik kazandığını incelemektedir. Ali Fehmi, Bulgaristan'daki özgürlükten yararlanarak gazetesini özgürce yayınlamış ve bu da Osmanlı hükümeti tarafından hafiyeler ve Bulgar Komiseri aracılığıyla gözetlenmesine yol açmıştır. Ali Fehmi ile Osmanlı hükümeti

arasında artan gerginliğe ek olarak, 1905'te Bulgar hükümeti tarafından da sınır dışı edilmiştir. Daha sonra Paris, Cenevre, Mısır ve Afganistan'da bulunmuştur. Bu tez, Ali Fehmi'nin kendisini önce yerel, sonra küresel olarak Müslümanların ve Türklerin gelişip ilerlemelerine adanmış olduğunu çizmektedir. Bu araştırmada kullanılan başlıca kaynakların çoğu Osmanlı arşiv belgeleri ve *Muvazene*'nin birinci yıl nüshalarıdır. Bu tez, genel olarak Bulgaristan'daki Müslümanlar ve özellikle de Jön Türkler hakkındaki mevcut literatüre katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

42.471 kelime

Ali Tüfekçi, annem, babam, ablam ve Cüneyd abime...

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Introduction

The consequences of 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War were devastating for the Ottoman Empire. The majority of Ottoman provinces in the Balkans became either independent or autonomous, and the Berlin Treaty served as a guarantee for these newly established states. Among them were the Autonomous Province of Eastern Rumelia and Independent Principality of Bulgaria. In 1885, the Principality annexed Eastern Rumelia, further erasing the already diminished Ottoman control. Besides challenging political struggles faced by the Ottoman state, this turning point also initiated a challenging period for the Muslim population that remained outside of the Ottoman territories. Indeed, the citizenship rights of Muslims and Turks in Bulgaria became a critical issue, which occupied the diplomatic agendas of both countries for over a century.¹

While Muslims and Turks in the Balkans were trying to adapt to the new historical context, the endeavors of intellectuals like Filibeli Ali Fehmi² should be carefully examined. The common thread among Muslim intellectuals living in Bulgaria in the late nineteenth century was their endeavor to locate themselves in a broader world and ponder on this matter. While closely following events happening worldwide, they also

1 Kemal H. Karpat, *Balkanlarda Osmanlı Mirası ve Milliyetçilik*, (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2019), 244.

2 Filibeli means “from Filibe;” Ali Fehmi is known with his birthplace.

empathized with other Muslims who shared similar experiences. In order to overcome the struggles Muslims faced, they aimed to reform the institutions, reviving national consciousness among the Muslim community, and to get rid of corrupted religious authorities.³ Furthermore, Balkan intellectuals thought that the Ottoman maladministration was responsible for all these existential anxieties. Most of them, including Filibeli Ali Fehmi, embraced the Young Turk ideology, and advocated for significant changes within the Ottoman governance.

In the existing literature, Ali Fehmi remains an understudied figure, and there is no study that centers on the *Muvazene* newspaper itself. This thesis will evaluate the newly acquired status of the Muslim population in Bulgaria and the new situations that come with it through the prism of the biography of Ali Fehmi and his newspaper *Muvazene*. It also aims to provide new perspectives on a number of important issues. In the context of the late nineteenth century, studying Ali Fehmi and *Muvazene*, firstly, offers detailed information about the Young Turk press in Bulgaria. Secondly, it sheds light on various conditions faced by Muslim communities in Principality of Bulgaria. Finally, it offers a chance to comprehend where Ali Fehmi was standing in comparison with other Young Turks, and how *Muvazene* compared to the diverse Young Turk publications.

Ali Fehmi was born in Filibe in 1871. During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, he migrated to Istanbul with his family and returned to their hometown after the war. As he graduated from the local middle school (rüşdiye), he went to İstanbul and he graduated from the *Mülkiye* school in 1889. He worked as a teacher and school principal in various schools in the empire for eight years. However, probably due to his sympathy towards Young Turks, he was dismissed from his profession. His job applications yielded no results, and in 1896, he had no choice but to return to his homeland Filibe again.

3 Milena B. Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation: Muslim Reforms in the Balkans*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2021), 178-179.

Filibe had become a part of the autonomous Eastern Rumelia with the signing of the Berlin Treaty in 1878, and the province had lost its “autonomous” status in 1885 by the annexation of the Principality of Bulgaria. The Muslim minority, as in all of Bulgaria, thereby, was laying the foundations for the terrifying “uncertainty” mentioned by Zygmunt Bauman: foreigners who made classification and determination uncontrollable, who threatened nation-building, who fit neither into the category of “friends” nor “enemies,” and whose identity could not be decided.⁴ Besides, the Ottoman struggle for dominance continued in the autonomous province of Eastern Rumelia even after the annexation in 1885, regardless of how successful it was. Even the words used in Ottoman documents were symbolic, suggesting continued Ottoman claims of sovereignty over the region.⁵

Ali Fehmi was born in Filibe in 1871, while the city was not yet a part of any Bulgarian government. Soon, he was declared as a “foreigner” in Bulgaria after 1885, as an “enemy” by the Ottoman central administration from 1897 onwards, and a reformist “friend” for the Young Turks. However, he identified himself as the “friend” of the Muslim population in Bulgaria, the “enemy” of the misconducts and corruptions of Ottoman administrators, and a “stranger” in the factionalized nature of the Young Turks. Yet, he had made important contributions to the local settlement of the Young Turks in the Balkans, and by using his ideology and reformist attitude as a tool, made great effort on behalf of the Muslim population’s benefit in Bulgaria. His newspaper *Muvazene* became one of the most powerful Young Turk propaganda tools. For the Young Turks, the condition of Muslims in Bulgaria “was a vivid portrayal of many of the problems Muslims around the world experienced.”⁶ *Muvazene* became an instructive instrument supporting these opinions and “articulating local

4 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernlik ve Müphemlik*, trans. İsmail Türkmen (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2020), 85-89.

5 Mahir Aydın, “Bulgaristan Komiserliği,” *Belgeler: Türk Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi* 17(21), 71.

6 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 126.

Muslim grievances.”⁷ In *Muvazene*, he dedicated himself to connect any kind of issue to the progression and salvation of the Muslim community.

Ali Fehmi advocated neutrality against factionalism within the Young Turk organization. He was a defender of reason and logic, but he was not a positivist and materialist. At the time when the first copy of *Muvazene* was published in 1897, Ali Fehmi was a “Bulgarian Muslim;” he was concerned about the education and progress of the Muslim population. Like all the Young Turks, he dealt with social problems like a doctor, ponder on these problems, created solutions, and made criticisms in order to heal the “patient.”⁸

Ali Fehmi witnessed the endeavor of maintaining the symbolic existence of the Ottoman Empire, all kinds of abuses of office, poverty, and the bad conditions of Muslim schools. He tried to create a solution through his newspaper *Muvazene* from an intellectual and an instructive perspective. So where exactly does Ali Fehmi stand in historical literature? Did his views coincide with the Young Turk ideological agenda? Does the way he examined issues in *Muvazene* newspaper, his rhetoric and his suggestions contribute to our understanding of his identity and those of the Young Turks? What information does his life story give us about Ali Fehmi’s identity? In order to analyze these questions, Ali Fehmi and the *Muvazene* newspaper should be examined regarding the social, cultural, political and economic situations in Bulgaria; the ideologies and activities of the Young Turks.

§ 1.1 The New Ottomans and The Young Turks

The New Ottomans demanded the establishment of a constitution within the Empire. With this motivation, the Young Ottomans, who developed the Ottoman Empire's first constitution and parliamentary system, believed that these developments were crucial for the Empire.⁹ Despite not

7 *Ibid.*

8 Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasî Fikirleri (1895-1908)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008), 21.

9 *Ibid.*, 30.

achieving a homogeneous unity among themselves, New Ottomans had an ambition to modernize the Ottoman government in common. Thus, some of the new Ottomans had the opportunity to apply reforms they had prepared, to participate in the activities of preparing the constitution - with the encouragement of Mithat Paşa.¹⁰

The Young Ottomans were disbanded in 1877 by the Sultan, they were sent into exile. However, some members of the Young Ottomans such as İsmail Kemal Bey, Sami Paşazade Sezai Bey and Murad Bey continued their suspicious activities abroad.¹¹ After the disbanding of the Young Ottomans, Bulgaria became one of the places where the reformist movements gained momentum. The teachers assigned to Muslim schools in Bulgaria were still coming from the center. The free intellectual life in Bulgaria encouraged many Turks who went there to engage in libertarian publications here.¹²

The Young Turks were formed in 1889 and continued their activities until 1922. İbrahim Temo's memoirs about the foundation of the Young Turk movement, which originated in Military Medicine, are quite instructive.¹³ The Istanbul branch of the CUP was established in 1895. Its branches were also opened in Paris and in Egypt. Among the factors that motivated the Young Turks, as Şerif Mardin argued, was the discrepancy of the value judgements between the "ideal" community they envisioned and the community of the period under the rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II. In addition, "proto-nationalism" was a consequence of the new environment provided by the organization of the provincial administration.¹⁴

Immediately after, a wave of arrest began, and the Young Turks voluntarily started to exile. Exile in Europe was both practical and formative for some young Turks. It provided links with either Western government

10 *Ibid*, 33.

11 *Ibid*.

12 *Ibid*, 47.

13 Stefano Taglia, *Intellectuals and Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Young Turks on the Challenges of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2015), 29.

14 *Ibid*, 20.

or civil society, and at the same time, contacts with the European intelligentsia, which heavily influenced the intellectual development of the organization.¹⁵ The Paris branch under Ahmed Rıza's leadership had become the meeting point. Although the Paris branch was dissolved for a while, the fact that Damat Mahmut Paşa fled to Paris with his sons in 1899 changed the balance and the Paris branch gained a new dimension.¹⁶ In a short time, names such as Ali Haydar Mithat and Ismail Kemal also joined the organization.

Although publishing was a non-profit business, it was the main propaganda tool for the Young Turks. There were important newspapers published in different regions. For instance, Murad Bey's newspaper *Mizan* was published first in Cairo and then Geneva. *Meşveret* was published first in Paris, and then Geneva and Brussels. *Osmanlı*, similarly, was firstly published in Geneva, then London and Folkestone; and *Vatan* was published in Athens.

That such newspapers were published abroad naturally related to the regime's ongoing pressures on freedom of thought in the Ottoman Empire. When Abdülhamid II ascended to the throne in 1876, the Constitutional Law (Kanun-i Esasi) was promulgated, which allowed press organs to operate within the framework of the law. In other words, there emerged press freedom for a while starting from 1876. In the following years, however, the scrutiny over newspapers increased. In the initial year of Abdülhamid's rule, before the parliament was dissolved, the first discussions concerning printed materials were triggered by the satirical press. Following these deliberations, the Senate, still functioning at that time, adopted a modified version of the 1864 regulation on May 24, 1877, leading to the ban on satirical magazines. Although this altered version of the 1864 Press Regulations remained theoretically in effect during

15 *Ibid*, 35.

16 *Ibid*, 39.

Abdülhamid II's reign, in practice, press matters were governed by discretionary measures.¹⁷ In 1885, a new bureau was established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, entitled Administration of Foreign Press Affairs (Matbuât-i Ecnebiye Müdürlüğü).¹⁸ A commission was established in order to control publications in 1881, and pre-censorship was applied to all printing processes in 1888.¹⁹ Nevertheless, journalism had become a profession that the Sultan closely monitored, encouraged, and provided financial support as long as they refrain from publishing oppositional content. Journalistic activities were supported by Abdülhamid II, and the Ottoman government provided financial support to newspapers it deemed loyal.

By the year 1896, as the Young Turks continued to flee to the Balkans, they had begun to consolidate their networks across the region. The most influential name in the organization of the Young Turks in the Balkans was Ibrahim Temo, he established new local branches in Tutrakan, Lom, Filibe, Sofia, and Pazarcık. Mustafa Ragıp was able to be appointed as a French teacher at a school in Vidin thanks to the mediation of the local committee, which proves that İbrahim Temo had sowed the seeds of a strong Young Turk network in the Balkans. During this period, the Palace also continued to follow the Young Turks. The Ottoman Bulgarian Commissioner Necib Melhame has followed Ibrahim Temo's activities strictly, just as he had followed those of Ali Fehmi. The palace had sent spies to Bulgaria, and one of the issues criticized in Ali Fehmi's *Muvazene* newspaper was the activities of Ottoman intelligence and spies in their midst.

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- 17 Mustafa Kemal Sincer, "Edhem Ruhi ve Balkan Gazetesi (1907-1908)," Master Thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2018, 54.
 - 18 İpek K. Yosmaoğlu, "Chasing the Printed Word: Press Censorship in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1913," *The Turkish Studies Association Journal*, 2003, Vol. 27, No. 1/2 (2003), 24.
 - 19 Sincer, "Edhem Ruhi ve Balkan Gazetesi (1907-1908)," 54.
 - 20 M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Örgüt Olarak Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük (1889-1902)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1986), 263.

§ 1.2 *Muvazene*

First published on September 1, 1897, the purpose of *Muvazene* was to provide scientific, statistical, pedagogical information to Muslims of Bulgaria. In a short time, the newspaper had become a widely accepted social platform in which readers could find the opportunity to share their problems and read about public discussions of Bulgarian Muslims. It is noteworthy that *Muvazene*, which started its publication life on the eve of the twentieth century, had become the most popular Young Turk publication in Bulgaria.

Muvazene newspaper contain important data on the social history of Muslims who became a minority group after the establishment of the Principality of Bulgaria and the annexation of Eastern Rumelia by the Principality. Ali Fehmi's biography and his newspaper *Muvazene*, thus, gain importance in offering the history and socio-cultural situation of the region. It provides prominent information about the problems that Muslims faced, especially those about having a minority status in Bulgaria; the abuses in pious foundations led to intense criticism of muftis, schools, spies and misconduct in office. It also provides important information about Ali Fehmi's Young Turk identity.

Through a discussion of *Muvazene*, this study will focus on Ali Fehmi, who became one of the most active names of the Young Turks in the Balkans. In so doing, this study will explore the changing dynamics in the region, how the population was affected by these changes, and the way Ali Fehmi dealt with these issues by using his newspaper as a tool. In addition, the editorial attitude of *Muvazene*, its materialistic features, the social network it gathered around itself, the issues of the Muslim and Turkish minorities in Bulgaria, the problems that the newspaper was sensitive to, the intellectual articles it contains, the dialogues established between different copies will be discussed. Thus, Ali Fehmi's understudied life story will be helpful in comprehending where the *Muvazene* newspaper stands within the Young Turk publications and Ali Fehmi's place within the Young Turks.

This thesis focuses solely on the first-year issues of *Muvazene* newspaper, which was a deliberate choice. After all, the first-year issues of *Muvazene* are quite significant sources that provide information about Ali Fehmi's mission and vision. Additionally, the first-year issues of *Muvazene* also help us see whether Ali Fehmi remained loyal to the newspaper's vision and mission or not. This does not mean that documents that deal with later periods are neglected. To the contrary, various archival sources have been consulted in reconstructing Ali Fehmi's biography.

Muvazene became one of the longest-running Muslim journals in Bulgaria until its closure in 1905. When considered together with the biography of Ali Fehmi, *Muvazene's* popularity provides an assessment of Bulgaria from the Muslim perspective. Besides, although he claimed his impartiality about the fractions between Young Turks, both *Muvazene's* popularity and Ali Fehmi's biography helps us to understand Young Turks and the Young Turk press in Bulgaria much better.

I hope this study will motivate new studies about Ali Fehmi and *Muvazene*. I studied archival records in order to understand the attitude of the empire towards *Muvazene* and Ali Fehmi. Although I have mainly focused on the copies of *Muvazene's* first year, further studies surely will offer much more information which will lead researchers to get a comprehensive perspective about history of Turkish and Muslim minorities in Bulgaria.

§ 1.3 State of the Field

In 1984, as part of the assimilation policies implemented by the Bulgarian government towards Turkish citizens, more than a million Turks were forcibly compelled to change their names into Bulgarian. This process, aiming to assimilate all aspects of Turkish language, publications, speech, and Turkish identity, continued until 1989. While it was already known that half a million Turks had migrated from Bulgaria between 1923 and 1979, the explosive events of the 1980s triggered a new wave

of migration.²¹ These events, which received considerable attention, led to a significant awareness about Bulgarian Turks in Turkey. Tense diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Turkey brought to the forefront similar struggles experienced in the past, encouraging research about the shared history of these two countries. As a result, studies about Bulgarian Turks saw a significant increase in the late twentieth century in Turkey.

Regardless of which sub-discipline they belong, many of these historical accounts question the possibility of establishing a “friendship” between Turkey and Bulgaria, and many of them make references to recent political events. Bilal N. Şimşir’s *Bulgaristan Türkleri* is one of the most useful and prominent works in this field, which deals with the relations between Turkey and Bulgaria from the late nineteenth century to 2008, approaching the Bulgarian minority question from cultural, political, historical and anthropological perspectives.²² Hüseyin Avni Bıçaklı’s *Türkiye-Bulgaristan İlişkileri: 1878-2008* is also one of the most important and useful works similar to that of Şimşir’s book.²³ Although the planning of these books are very similar, in comparison to Şimşir’s book, Bıçaklı’s book focuses more intensively on diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Turkey and less on cultural perspective. Ömer Turan’s *Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878-1908)* can also be evaluated in this category.²⁴ These works mainly focus on Turks who remained in Bulgaria and Turks who were forced to migrate under the pressure of diplomatic relations. Justin McCarthy’s *Death and Exile* is another example to the works that focus on Muslims’ experiences of exile. Yet, McCarthy’s book differs from the works that I have mentioned above since its geographical scale includes not only the Balkans but wherever Muslims faced ethnic struggles throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The book offers an account about Muslims’ experiences of exile, migration and misery after the Empire’s withdrawal from their homelands. Just like McCarthy’s

21 Bilal N. Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri* (İstanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2012), 388.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Hüseyin Avni Bıçaklı, *Türkiye-Bulgaristan İlişkileri (1878-2008)* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2016).

24 Ömer Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1998).

book, each piece of these studies provides valuable data and comprehensive perspective about the stimulators and consequences of ethnic struggles.

Mahir Aydın's work "The Bulgarian Commissioners" offers another important perspective that sheds light upon specifically the late nineteenth century. Aydın explains that the Ottoman commissioners in Bulgaria were symbolic power on behalf of the Ottoman Empire, but over time it turned into an institution dealing with the vakıf and mufti issues. The Bulgarian commissioners, who were directly connected and loyal to Sultan Abdülhamid II, took critical duties in terms of informing the palace about the Young Turk activities in the Balkans.²⁵ In this context, Aydın's work reveals both the Empire's losses and its effort to dominate the Young Turks. Aydın's work titled *The Eastern Rumelia Vilayet* also stands out as a detailed source based on archival documents about the formation, administration and annexation of the Eastern Rumelia.²⁶

The study of Muslim and Turkish minorities in Bulgaria was another field of research for scholars such as Ali Eminov, Türker Acaroğlu, and Hüseyin Memişoğlu. For example, Ali Eminov's *Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria*²⁷ problematizes the issues of Bulgarian nationalism and its impacts on Muslim and Turkish minorities. While Türker Acaroğlu's works have an approach similar to Ali Eminov's, Acaroğlu also concentrates on linguistic and literary research. Especially the second volume of *Bulgaristan Türkleri Üzerine Araştırmalar*,²⁸ *Bulgarlar ve Bulgaristan Üzerine Yüzyıllık Türkçe Kaynakça (1878-1908)*²⁹ and *Azınlıklar ve Yabancıların Aldığı Adlar ve Soyadlar Sözlüğü*³⁰ are examples of them

25 Aydın, "Bulgaristan Komiserliği".

26 Mahir Aydın, *Şarkî Rumeli Vilâyeti* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1992).

27 Ali Eminov, *Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria* (London: Hurst, 1997).

28 M. Türker Acaroğlu, *Bulgaristan Türkleri Üzerine Araştırmalar II* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2007).

29 M. Türker Acaroğlu, *Bulgarlar ve Bulgaristan Üzerine Yüzyıllık Türkçe Kaynakça (1878-1978)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1997).

30 M. Türker Acaroğlu, *Azınlıklar ve Yabancıların Aldığı Türkçe Adlar ve Soyadlar Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2009).

written by Acaroğlu. Hüseyin Memişoğlu's book *Bulgaristan'da Türk Kültürü*³¹ can also be considered as cultural research that investigate the condition of artifacts (mosques, masjids, shrines, schools) that carry signals from the culture of Turks.

Among the works that question the newly emerged definitions, political and cultural boundaries, and identities of the late nineteenth century, Kemal H. Karpat's *Balkanlarda Osmanlı Mirası ve Milliyetçilik*³² problematizes strict definitions and explains how the concepts of 'nation' and 'nationality' inherited from the Ottoman tradition had undergone changes with modernity. Similarly, *The Orient Within*³³ and *Imagining the Balkans*³⁴ motivate researchers to make critical thinking about strict definitions. Yonca Köksal has also conducted significant research on Bulgaria. Particularly, her research yields important insights into the process of constructing national identity alongside the emergence of nation-states in the late nineteenth century.³⁵ Köksal who explains Muslim and Turkish minorities' relationship with the Bulgarian state also touches upon the connections and relationships established by members of Turkish and Muslim minorities with their contemporaries in other parts of the world.

Following the extensive literature that emerged after the 1980s, the newest studies presented a different and revisionist perspective. These new studies examine minorities regarding the changing dynamics of the late nineteenth century. For instance, studying the history of Muslims in Bulgaria in the late nineteenth century, Milena Methodieva investigates Muslims' experiences of modernity in Bulgaria, thus moving the issue beyond migration and minority issues. While Methodieva focuses on the efforts of Muslim intellectuals, she highlights that Muslims aimed to reform

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- 31 Hüseyin Memişoğlu, *Bulgaristan'da Türk Kültürü* (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1995).
- 32 Karpat, *Balkanlarda Osmanlı Mirası ve Milliyetçilik*.
- 33 Mary Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim minorities and the negotiation of nationhood in modern Bulgaria*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).
- 34 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 35 Yonca Köksal, "Transnational Networks and Kin States: the Turkish Minority in Bulgaria, 1878–1940," *Nationalities Papers* 38, no. 2 (2010): 191–211.

their institutions, to revive national consciousness among the Muslim community, and to get rid of corrupted religious authorities in order to overcome the struggles they faced. This perspective presents itself as a highly productive field because it prompts contemplation about the alternative identities of the Muslim minority in Bulgaria. Another study that conceptually problematizes the historical process leading from the Ottoman imperial past to the Bulgarian national identity is Anna Mirkova's book *Muslim Land, Christian Labor*.³⁶ The vakıf issue, which is one of the issues that Ali Fehmi often addressed in *Muvazene* and criticized the managers, is examined in Mirkova's work as a tool for the Bulgarian national identity building process. While problematizing the issue of property, Mirkova sheds light on the sociopolitical history of the region, at the same time questioning the limits of pluralism in the Balkans.

There are also various articles that make great contributions to our comprehension about the history of Muslim minority in Bulgaria. For instance, Miloš Jovanović questions what did destroying the Ottoman past and building national capitals mean for Balkan bourgeoisie at a time when the nation states were rising.³⁷ The work emphasizes that for the Balkan bourgeoisie, it was not a goal in itself, but was the first step on the way to industrial modernity, examining the two elements in a symbiotic way. The article provides important data by touching upon the pragmatic facts behind the heroic narratives attributed to the growth of the cities of Sofia and Belgrade. And again, it offers comparisons between the urban transformation breakthrough initiated by Mithat Paşa in the Tuna province. It also contains traces of how the narrative of liberation from Ottoman rule turned into a narrative of heroism in the Balkan geography, where the empire retreated and the nation states rose.

36 Anna Mirkova, *Muslim Land, Christian Labor: Transforming Ottoman Imperial Subjects into Bulgarian National Citizens (1878-1939)* (New York: Central European University, 2017).

37 Miloš Jovanović, "Bourgeois Balkans: World-Building in Belgrade and Sofia, 1830-1912," PhD Dissertation, (Illinois: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016).

Popek contributes to the literature of Muslim migrations with an alternative migration narrative.³⁸ While focusing on the Bulgarian migrations that took place between 1878 and 1900, he evaluates the population flow to the largest cities of the Principality of Bulgaria. The population mobility offers useful inferences when read together with Mirkova's book.³⁹ The article also underlines the degree to which migrations have played a major role in historiography. The common point of all these works is that they question the historical narratives of the twentieth century and are distanced from sentimental narratives.

Another article by Popek's also focuses on the topic of *mufti* institution, which is also often discussed in *Muvazene*.⁴⁰ The article analyzes the functioning of the mufti institution in Bulgaria at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. With this theme, reasonably reach some arguments about the other Muslim institutions. In this context, Popek examines the attitude of Bulgarians towards Muslim minority and examines the symbolic meanings of *Sheikhulislam*, mufti and other Muslim officials. This assumes another dimension of the Muslim minorities in Bulgaria. It is possible to catch important clues about institutional corruptions that are the subject of criticism from this article.

While there exists a rich literature on the history of post-1878 Bulgaria and Muslim minorities in the country, it is necessary to carry out a careful examination of archival sources and related passages from the copies of *Muvazene* to reconstruct the biography of Ali Fehmi. Although some of the studies about the Young Turks, Turkish and Muslim minorities in Bulgaria, and Turkish press in Bulgaria mention Ali Fehmi and *Muvazene*, there is not any detailed and comprehensive work about him.

38 Krzysztof Popek, "The Bulgarian Migrations and the End of Ottoman Rule in Bulgaria (1878-1900)," *Historijski Zbornik* 71(1), 2018, 45-59.

39 Mirkova, *Muslim Land, Christian Labor*.

40 Krzysztof Popek, "The Functioning of the Mufti Institution in Bulgaria at the Beginning of the 20th Century: A Case Study," *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, 53(3), 2018, 217-232.

Through a careful analysis of archival sources and *Muvazene* newspaper, this study attempts to fill this gap benefiting from secondary sources mentioning Ali Fehmi and synthesizing these secondary sources with primary materials.

Adem Ruhi Karagöz's *Bulgaristan Türk Basını* offers information about the Turkish press in Bulgaria between 1879 and 1945.⁴¹ This source includes Ali Fehmi and his *Muvazene* newspaper but does not provide a comparative perspective about him due to the organization of the book. Muammer Göçmen's *İsviçre'de Jön Türk Basını* can also be evaluated in this category.⁴² Besides being orderly sources written about the Turkish press in Bulgaria and containing organized and useful information about the authors and newspapers, none of them provides sufficient information about Ali Fehmi and *Muvazene*.

The publishing activities of the Balkan Turks cannot be considered in isolation from the history of the Young Turks. Among the works about Young Turk organization and their activities, *The Young Turks in Opposition*,⁴³ *Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük*,⁴⁴ and *Preparation for a Revolution*⁴⁵ are quite important ones. These are written by one of the most important researchers of the field, M. Şükrü Hanioğlu. In *Preparation for a Revolution*, Hanioğlu offers a relatively detailed biography of Ali Fehmi and he tells the story of how his newspaper became the most important young Turk newspaper in the Balkans. Şerif Mardin's book *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri* describes in detail the ideological background of the Young Turks and how their ideas have developed over

41 Adem Ruhi Karagöz, *Bulgaristan Türk Basını: 1879-1945* (İstanbul: Üniversite Matbaası, 1945).

42 Muammer Göçmen, *İsviçre'de Jön Türk Basını ve Türk siyasal hayatına etkileri: (1889-1902)* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 1995).

43 M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

44 Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Örgüt Olarak*.

45 M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks 1902-1908*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

time.⁴⁶ Ali Fehmi and *Muvazene* newspaper are briefly mentioned in Mardin's work, as well. Nonetheless, Ali Fehmi did not attract much attention compared to the major Young Turk activities in general.

Ali Fehmi witnessed the symbolic existence of the Ottoman Empire in Filibe, observed all kinds of struggles such as poverty and lack of education, and he tried to find solutions to them. Still, he was not much researched among the minor Young Turks either. As the owner and chief editor of *Muvazene*, however, he offered a debate platform to the readers, suggested solutions, and as the most important publishing organ of the Young Turk press in the Balkans, he kept his newspaper alive from 1897 to 1910 one way or another.

The most detailed information and comprehensive research about Ali Fehmi and *Muvazene* can be found in Methodieva's book *Between Empire and Nation*, which approaches Balkan history from a revisionist perspective.⁴⁷ She uses Bulgarian and Turkish archival materials, and newspapers published in Bulgaria, in addition to numerous secondary sources. After giving information about historical context, Methodieva highlights where to locate the Young Turks, the Ottoman administration, Muslim intellectuals in Bulgaria, and the Bulgarian government within this background. Various initiatives of Ali Fehmi and other intellectuals in Bulgaria, hence, reach significance in her book. For this reason, Methodieva's book became one of the most contributing works while preparing the detailed biography of Ali Fehmi and conducting an in-depth examination of the *Muvazene* newspaper in my thesis. On the other hand, my contribution to Ali Fehmi's biography was to synthesize any findings that could fill the gaps in a logical framework and present them chronologically. In addition, reading the first 52 issues of *Muvazene* provided detailed information about Ali Fehmi's ideas about local issues such as schools, vakıf properties, muftis in Bulgaria, and global events.

Of course, the problems that Ali Fehmi addressed in *Muvazene* did not appear together all of a sudden after the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78.

46 Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri*.

47 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*.

Therefore, to study these problems properly, one need to have a general idea of the history of the region, migration movements, the ideas of the Young Turks, the construction of the Bulgarian national identity. All this information is essential for placing Ali Fehmi and *Muvazene* in an appropriate historical context.

§ 1.4 Chapter Outline

The first chapter of this thesis aims to reveal the developments that influenced the late nineteenth century by discussing the factors that paved the way for the Tanzimat reforms. The first chapter focuses specifically on the reflections of the Tanzimat reforms in the Balkans, briefly addressing both the physical and ideological dimensions of the reform movement, particularly in the pilot region of the Tuna Province under Midhat Paşa's initiatives. After emphasizing that many endeavors in the region were disrupted by the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War, causing disruptions in population balance and stability while completely altering economic equilibrium, the chapter proceeds to discuss how the reform movement initiated with Tanzimat continued through Bulgaria, although the motivation behind the reforms underwent a drastic change. This way, the first chapter provides a perspective on “continuing” and “erasing” elements in the region, briefly touching on both positive and negative experiences of Muslims in the new order. After providing information about the implementation of minority rights provisions in the Berlin Treaty after the war, the efforts of Sultan Abdülhamid to sustain symbolic Ottoman rule in the region are examined. Against this historical background, the mutual shaping of Ottoman and Bulgarian identities in the late nineteenth century is highlighted.

The second chapter starts with a brief introduction to the history of the Young Turks and their activities in the Balkans. Following this, a detailed biography of Ali Fehmi is presented. In order to offer a comprehensive and detailed biography, this chapter compares how Ali Fehmi described himself in the *Muvazene* newspaper and how this self-description is reflected in Ottoman archival documents. It is conveyed that despite

numerous attempts by the Ottoman government to shut down the critical *Muvazene* newspaper, Ali Fehmi benefited from press freedom in Bulgaria from 1897 to 1905. The chapter continues with his relocation of the newspaper to Geneva after being expelled from Bulgaria due to his increasingly provocative style, his travel through Egypt to Afghanistan since he was banned from entering Russia, his diplomatic responsibilities there, and how he kept members of the Committee of Union and Progress informed about his actions. In order to provide informative insights into his activities and aspirations in Afghanistan, this chapter details the telegram Ali Fehmi sent from Afghanistan to the Meclis-i Mebusan (Ottoman parliament) shortly after the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era. The second chapter concludes by covering the period up to Ali Fehmi's death in 1922.

The third chapter focuses on the first-year issues of the *Muvazene* newspaper. It presents Ali Fehmi's journalistic mission and vision, examining the newspaper's headlines, sources of information used in the newspaper, its readers, and the strong communication it established with its audience. It also explores how *Muvazene* transformed into a social platform discussing the problems of Muslims in Bulgaria through examples from the newspaper. Furthermore, the chapter highlights that the subjects Ali Fehmi criticized the most and sought solutions for, such as endowments (vakıf), muftis, and schools, were the most prominent topics covered in the *Muvazene* newspaper.

The nineteenth century was characterized by reform movements in the Ottoman Empire. Old, multi-ethnic, and traditional governance systems were giving way to new ideologies such as nationalism, communism, socialism, and secularism.⁴⁸ While shifting power dynamics and differing ideologies globally helped explain the decline of empires, biographies of individuals who cannot be precisely defined and whose identities do not fit neatly into a single category are particularly valuable in

48 Jack A. Goldstone, "Foreword," in the *Age of Rogues: Rebels, Revolutionaries and Racketeers at the Frontiers of Empires*, ed. Ramazan Hakkı Öztan and Alp Yenen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), xix.

understanding this era. Although Ali Fehmi's life is full of intriguing details, the complexities in his biography make it challenging for researchers to label him in one category. He was a foreigner of Bulgaria, he became an enemy of Hamidian regime over time, and a neutral member of the Young Turks. As emphasized in Jack A. Goldstone foreword to *Age of Rogues*, "many-sided" figures who lived in frontiers were "both products of their time and shapers of it."⁴⁹ The aim of this thesis is, therefore, not to categorize Ali Fehmi. On the contrary, this thesis focuses on the plural identities adopted by Ali Fehmi during a period of turmoil in the world order. In this context, Ali Fehmi's biography becomes one of the prominent sources for understanding the complexities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Ottoman Empire.

49 Ibid, xxi.

Historical Background

In the Ottoman *millet* system, communities that preferred to maintain their own religious beliefs rather than accepting Islam in the conquered territories were placed under the authority of their own religious leaders. The *millet* system drew a clear distinction between these communities, known as ‘Zimmi,’ meaning ‘protected non-Muslim population,’ and the Muslim subjects. In the Ottoman state system governed by Sharia and Kanun, Sharia emphasized that the government's power derived directly from religious sources, while the laws comprehensively encompassed all aspects of society.¹

The Ottoman government established a chain of intermediaries rather than directly governing all *millets* to administer the vast territories under its rule.² Under a strong central authority, this system was highly effective for the empire. However, periods of weakened central authority affected the provinces, thereby disrupted the imperial system. By the eighteenth century, the power imbalance between local administration and central authority became distinct. The *ayan* (local notables), who served as representatives of the central government in the Ottoman provinces, began

1 Barbara Jelavich, *Balkan Tarihi: 18. ve 19. Yüzyıllar*, çev. İhsan Durdu, Gülçin Tunalı, Haşim Koç (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2013), 44.

2 *Ibid*, 53.

to exhibit exploitative behaviors as the central authority weakened, deeply unsettling the local population with such corrupt practices.

Just like the *millet* system, another longstanding Ottoman arrangement was the land tenure. In the Ottoman Empire, the concept of land ownership was characterized by two different understandings until the enactment of the Land Code. ‘*Miri*’ lands were considered as state-owned, while ‘*mülk*’ lands were recognized as private property owned by individuals or specific communities. Additionally, there was a third category of land known as ‘vakıf’ or ‘charitable foundation,’ which comprised properties allocated for religious or philanthropic purposes. These vakıf lands typically served public interests, and the state did not seize control over them.³ However, çiftliks, particularly in the Balkans, blurred the clear legal distinction between miri and mülk lands in the Ottoman Empire. These çiftliks were typically vast agricultural properties operated by tenant farmers. Peasants would pay fees to acquire land and the right to cultivate it through inheritance, while tax collectors and officials would strengthen their positions and accumulate land as they carried out their duties. The Ottoman government’s regulations concerning çiftliks in the Balkans were limited, which constituted another source of unrest and discontent.⁴ The individual registration of land parcels was encouraged, which in turn created unrest among the estate owners who de facto possessed state land.

As these longstanding Ottoman arrangements proved inadequate to satisfy internal and external demands, Balkans experienced a period filled with complex issues and challenges involving various ethnic and religious groups during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although the Ottoman Empire officially embraced a general Ottoman identity for all its citizens, the Balkans witnessed widespread social discrimination and unequal treatment among different ethnic and religious groups due to administrative deficiencies. Inefficiency within the Ottoman provincial administrative system, widespread corruption, and

3 Mirkova, *Muslim Land, Christian Labor*, 63.

4 *Ibid*, 63-66.

favoritism led to significant inequality in the treatment of citizens, which also manifested as socio-economic barriers in other regions of the empire. These inequalities became particularly pronounced under the governance of different nations within the empire. The Ottoman subjects (reaya), driven primarily by economic grievances, turned to the government with their complaints, which prepared the groundwork for peasant uprisings, as it happened in 1835.⁵

Although it cannot be denied that the liberal and national movements, which greatly influenced Europe, had an impact on triggering the uprisings in the Balkans, the emergence of large ayan estates from the eighteenth century onward essentially constituted the main cause of peasant discontent in the Balkans during the nineteenth century.⁶ The dissatisfaction arising from the weakness of authority and the abuses by regional administrators led to a quest for a comprehensive legal system based on the principle of equality for the citizens. The search for such a system was driven by the desire to address the grievances of the people caused by the lack of effective governance and the exploitation by regional authorities, which paved the way for what are known as Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman Empire.

Overall, the Gülhane Edict, which brought about legal equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, abolished arbitrary punishments, and granted a central position to the people in state administration, was proclaimed as a political necessity due to various internal and external pressures.⁷ As İnalçık describes, the Tanzimat period was closely linked to the Westernization movement and was a part of the modernization process, aiming to reorganize the empire's corrupted institutions. This effort driven by the empire's struggle to survive, according to him, would cul-

5 Halil İnalçık, *Devlet-i Aliyye: Ayanlar, Tanzimat, Meşrutiyet*, C. IV, (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2017), 199; Jelavich, *Balkan Tarihi*, 371.

6 Halil İnalçık, "Çiftlik," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (İstanbul: TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 1993). <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ciftlik> (June 18, 2023).

7 İnalçık, *Devlet-i Aliyye*, 145.

minate in 1876 with the Ottoman Constitution (Kanun-i Esasi), establishing an Ottoman unity where legal equality for all imperial subjects was ensured.⁸

§ 2.1 The Tanzimat Period

The Tanzimat reforms in 1839 brought about a comprehensive and extensive modernization movement to the Empire, aimed at regaining the confidence of the West due to the Ottoman Empire's military defeats. Additionally, influenced by the allure of nationalist discourse, minority groups began questioning the imposed but unrealistic 'Ottoman' identity, leading to efforts to bring the Empire closer to universal standards and simultaneously strengthen the loyalty of non-Muslim citizens to the Ottoman state.⁹ The Tanzimat reforms aimed to confirm the loyalty of minorities to the Ottoman Empire by granting them equal rights and to preserve the unity and integrity of the empire. The Ottoman millet system, which faced the danger of its foundations being undermined, was revitalized in a way, and the reforms sought to emphasize an Ottoman identity that encompassed all communities.

During the Tanzimat period, the first step taken was to make changes in the provincial administration. Until then, governors had extensive powers, which they often abused. Limits were placed on the influence of governors, and the aim was to ensure the participation of all social classes in governance to a certain extent.¹⁰ The land issue, which had long remained unresolved and determined the material and social conditions of the reaya had to be addressed, according to the Ottoman administration. It was a difficult, complex, and highly delicate matter, as disturbing one of the parties involved could jeopardize the integrity of the land. For instance, the 1849 uprisings in Bosnia were primarily triggered by the rebellion of the *beys* (local nobility) who realized the extent of their

8 *Ibid*, 197.

9 Taglia, *Intellectuals and Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 2.

10 İnalçık, "Çiftlik," 199.

losses in interest due to the measures taken to prevent the uprising of the reaya.¹¹ Regardless of the circumstances, a shift towards individual ownership was embraced during this period, emphasizing individualistic and private rights. The assessment and collection of taxes also underwent profound changes, transitioning from community-based taxation to a focus on individual taxpayers.¹²

As part of the reforms that aimed to protect the rights of non-Muslims, the system of tax farming (*iltizam*) was abolished, and through the Reform Edict (*Islahat Fermanı*), the principle of complete equality in taxation was declared, converting taxes into a military levy.¹³ In order to free tax collection affairs from the control of governors and local elites (*ayan*), tax collectors were appointed from the central government.¹⁴ Officials and officers no longer collected fees from the people under various names. In 1856, the *jizya* tax was abolished and replaced with military service fees.¹⁵ These reforms aimed to establish a more equitable and standardized system throughout the empire.¹⁶

§ 2.2 The Young Ottomans

As the non-Muslim citizens of the Ottoman Empire began to demand equal treatment and rights, Ottoman reformers, believing in the continuation of the imperial order, started to seek more inclusive versions of 'nationalism.' The solution they adopted, *Ottomanism*, was an ideology derived not from the people, but the pragmatic requisites in order to protect the empire. According to this ideology, all nations (Albanians, Arabs, Armenians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Kurds, Serbs, Syrians, Turks, etc.) would be

11 İnalçık, *Devlet-i Aliyye*, 203.

12 Mirkova, *Muslim Land, Christian Labor*, 63.

13 İnalçık, *Devlet-i Aliyye*, 199.

14 *Ibid*, 151.

15 *Ibid*, 155.

16 Mirkova, *Muslim Land, Christian Labor*, 66.

considered equal as part of the Ottoman nation in order to reduce ethnic and religious tensions.¹⁷

At this point, Şerif Mardin's thesis about the moral conflict among the Tanzimat bureaucrats comes to mind. Mardin argues that the influence of the Enlightenment ideas in Europe reached the Ottoman territories not through philosophers but rather through new institutions that were reluctantly adopted from the West.¹⁸ In the 1860s, Tanzimat bureaucrats, emphasized that constitutionalism was in line with the true spirit of Islam, as consultation (meşveret) is fundamental in Islam. This effort to harmonize the two, the “modern” and “Islamic,” can be clearly observed.¹⁹

The early proponents of *Ottomanism* naturally consisted of bureaucrats from the Tanzimat period, known as the Young Ottomans. In response to the challenges faced by the Ottoman Empire, they proposed the establishment of a consultative assembly (meclis-i meşveret), division of powers, and the declaration of a new constitution as solutions.²⁰ According to the Young Ottomans, the Imperial Edict of Gülhane and the Reform Edict (Islahat Fermanı) did not fully achieve this goal. Although these reforms satisfied Europe to some extent, they did not provide long-term contributions to the welfare of the Ottoman Empire. Particularly, the wide-ranging rights granted to non-Muslims through the Reform Edict had the potential to increase tensions between different religious groups in the future.²¹ According to the Young Ottomans, unless equal participation in the decision-making process was granted to all Ottoman citizens without discrimination based on religion and ethnicity, other reforms aimed at meeting the demands of non-Muslims would provide an opportunity for European intervention in Ottoman internal affairs. Indeed, the

17 Taglia, *Intellectuals and Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 3.

18 Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasî Fikirleri*, 19.

19 Taglia, *Intellectuals and Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 3.

20 Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri*, 33.

21 Nazan Çiçek, *The Young Ottomans: Turkish Critics of Eastern Question in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York: Taurus Academic Studies, 2010), 116.

non-Muslim subjects could seek assistance from their European co-religionists at any time. In such a situation, a de facto division could arise between Muslims and non-Muslims, as non-Muslims would find support from outside sources while the Muslim subjects would have no counterpart. In their criticisms of the reforms, the Young Ottomans point to a new environment of inequality where Muslims are being oppressed.²²

§ 2.3 First Tanzimat Reforms on the Balkans

By the nineteenth century, the education of Muslims and Bulgarian Orthodox populations in the Balkans was solely based on religious principles. Muslims had access to mosque-based madrasas and neighborhood religious schools (mekteps), while Bulgarians had schools called *Kiliyni uçilišta*.²³ In 1838, the first imperial secondary schools (rüşdiyes) were opened.²⁴ Education tools were renewed, and maps and globes were introduced to some schools. The number of primary schools (sıbyan mekteps) and secondary schools increased, making the Tuna province one of the most developed centers in terms of education, after Istanbul. A provincial printing house was established, and schoolbooks started to be printed there.²⁵ There has been a significant increase in the number of mosques, medreses, schools, rüşdiyes, tekkes, and mescits.

Petrov examines the reflections of the Tanzimat period in the Balkans during the tenure of Midhat Paşa (1864-1868), the first governor of the Tuna province.²⁶ The Tuna province encompassed the region from the Danube River to the Balkan Mountains including the regions of Silistre, Vidin, and Niş, while the Edirne province included the area from the Balkan Mountains to the Marmara Sea.²⁷ Tuna province was established in

22 *Ibid*, 120.

23 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 35.

24 *Ibid*, 35.

25 *Ibid*, 36.

26 Milen Petrov, "Tanzimat for the Countryside: Midhat Paşa and the Vilayet of Danube, 1864-1868," PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2006.

27 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 25.

1864, and was designated as a testing ground for comprehensive reforms during the Tanzimat era. As the governor, Midhat Paşa took the lead in implementing legal, institutional, infrastructural, communicational, and economic reforms. The reforms aimed to build a more inclusive and just society based on the principles of the rule of law and equal treatment, while also preserving the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. During this period, Christians began to participate in administrative councils. Projects such as road construction, bridge building, school establishment, and model farms were undertaken, and efforts were made to facilitate the education of Bulgarian youths abroad.²⁸ The number of Bulgarian schools in the Tuna province also increased, reaching 1,504 by the year 1877. Three years after the establishment of the Tuna Province, following the Tuna example, the Edirne province was founded in 1867.

The Education Regulation (Maarif Nizamnamesi) was issued in the same year with the establishment of Edirne province, and it encompassed the education system as a whole. According to the regulation, there would be elementary schools (sıbyan mektebi) in neighborhoods and villages, secondary schools (rüşdiye) in towns with more than 500 households, high schools (idadi) in towns with a thousand households, and imperial colleges (sultani) in provincial capitals. However, the opening of high schools and imperial colleges in the Balkans was postponed, and after the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War, this issue remained completely suspended. The Tuna and Edirne provinces were unable to benefit from the high schools that started to be established in other regions of the empire after the 1880s.²⁹

§ 2.4 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War and the Berlin Congress

The nineteenth century was a tumultuous period for the Ottoman Empire, since it was a time when states such as Russia and Austria supported

28 Jelavich, *Balkan Tarihi*, 371.

29 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 40.

nationalist uprisings among Balkan nations. After France's defeat by Germany in 1870, Russia was freed from the provisions of the Paris Treaty and began to pursue a more active policy towards the Ottoman Balkans. It supported the creation of public opinion against the Muslim Turks during the Bulgarian uprising, while providing military aid to the Balkan nations and engaging in activities to isolate the Ottoman Empire in European politics by supporting the uprisings in Herzegovina and Bulgaria. Unlike the previous Bulgarian uprisings that the Ottoman Empire had managed to suppress, the 1876 uprisings, which were externally supported and organized, could not be quelled.³⁰ Russia, by encouraging the Slavic population in Bulgaria to revolt, was backing the idea of establishing a separate state. Its primary goal was to remove the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans through pan-Slavic policies and reach southward to the Aegean Sea by creating a state with a border there.³¹

Another country that played a role in the Bulgarian uprisings was the British, where Gladstone came to power in 1868, ushering in a liberal administration. During Gladstone's tenure, the policy of protecting the Ottoman Empire was abandoned, and a more assertive policy against the Ottoman Empire was adopted.³² In the 1870s, the British allowed the establishment of pan-Slavic committees in London and turned a blind eye to Panslavists engaging in guerrilla warfare against the Turks.³³

The uprisings in Bulgaria and Herzegovina in 1876, along with the Ottoman Empire's inability to repay its foreign debts, contributed to a negative image of the Turks in European public opinion.³⁴ The Ottoman Empire was seeking a way to reconcile with Western powers.³⁵ With Russia's encouragement, Serbia and Montenegro declared war against the

30 Bıçaklı, *Türkiye-Bulgaristan İlişkileri*, 84

31 *Ibid*, 85.

32 İnalçık, *Devlet-i Aliyye*, 292.

33 Bıçaklı, *Türkiye-Bulgaristan İlişkileri*, 85.

34 Aydın, "Doksanüç Harbi."

35 Mithat Aydın, "Osmanlı-İngiliz İlişkilerinde İstanbul Konferansı (1876)'nın Yeri," *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 25 (2006): 102.

Ottoman Empire. Following these battles that ended with Ottoman victory, a conference was held in Istanbul with the participation of England, France, Russia, Germany, Austria, Italy, and the Ottoman Empire. During the conference, it was especially the proposals presented by the British representative Salisbury, which were in line with Russia's interests, that indicated a shift in Britain's foreign policy.³⁶ The Ottoman Empire rejected the proposals presented to them. Russia accelerated its war preparations in the new political context, secured Austria's neutrality, and ultimately declared war on the Ottoman Empire on April 24, 1877.³⁷

After the war which had resulted in the defeat of the Ottoman forces in the fronts of the Danube and Eastern Anatolia, the Principality of Bulgaria, with a local government and militias, while paying taxes to the Sublime Porte, was established in the Balkans. The independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania would be recognized, and Bosnia-Herzegovina would be granted autonomy. War indemnities would be paid to Russia, and Russia would be granted certain privileges.³⁸ However, the region's division outlined in the Treaty of San Stefano, signed on March 3, 1878, did not satisfy the Great Powers, leading to the convening of a congress in Berlin.³⁹

According to the Berlin Treaty, which consisted of 64 articles, the Bulgarian territories determined in the Treaty of San Stefano were divided into three regions. First of all, a Bulgarian principality, which remained under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire but had internal freedom, was established in the administrative divisions (sancaks) of Sofya, Vidin, Rusçuk, Tırnova, and Varna, which were part of the former Tuna province. The prince of the principality would be elected by the people and approved by the Great Powers.

36 Aydın, "Osmanlı-İngiliz İlişkilerinde," 113

37 Aydın, "Doksanüç Harbi."

38 Ibid.

39 Bıçaklı, *Türkiye-Bulgaristan İlişkileri*, 84.

Secondly, the province of Eastern Rumelia, which would be administratively independent but politically and militarily connected to the Ottoman Empire, was established with its center in Filibe). Aleko Paşa, of Bulgarian origin and born in Istanbul, was appointed as the governor.⁴⁰ It would be governed by a Christian governor appointed with the approval of European states. The autonomous Eastern Rumelia Province was established in the regions of Filibe and İslimye, which were part of the former Ottoman Edirne province. And the third region, Macedonia, after undergoing reforms, would remain within the Ottoman Empire.⁴¹

§ 2.5 Consequences of the War and the Berlin Settlement

In 1876, although the Bulgarian population was constituting the majority on the region, it was not superior to non-Bulgarians. For instance, in 1876, in the İslimiye and Filibe sanjaks, there were 100,500 Bulgarians compared to 186,400 non-Bulgarians, and in the Filibe sanjak, there were 382,500 Bulgarians compared to 564,000 non-Bulgarians.⁴² Yet, the 1877-78 war had profoundly disrupted the population balance in the Balkans. During the seven-month-long war on the Tuna front, approximately one million Muslims had to abandon their villages and homes and flee.⁴³ Half a million Muslims were also devastated later in the years 1877-78 due to massacres, famine, cold, and epidemic diseases. Considering those who could not return, Muslims in the Tuna and Edirne provinces became a numerical minority.⁴⁴

The Berlin Treaty, initially prepared as a protector of minority rights and the interests of religious and ethnic communities in Bulgarian territories, had a complex legacy in terms of its actual implementation and

40 *Ibid*, 74.

41 Ali İhsan Gencer, "Berlin Antlaşması," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (İstanbul: TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 1992). <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/berlin-antlasmasi> (June 18, 2023).

42 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 40.

43 Bıçaklı, *Türkiye-Bulgaristan İlişkileri*, 83.

44 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 26.

effectiveness. The dynamic nature of its implementation calls for a thoughtful examination that considers temporal and regional contexts. Delving into the reasons behind the gaps in the implementation of the provisions of the Berlin Treaty reveals a wide range of factors. Among these factors are the internal and external pressures that Bulgaria has been struggling with throughout its process of national formation, as well as the complexities like other newly established nation-states in the late nineteenth century. Property disputes, discrimination, and restrictions on religious practices were not only isolated incidents specific to Bulgaria, but also emblematic of the challenges faced by many regions undergoing political and social transitions during that period. The impact of local dynamics, administrative capacity, and the attitudes of regional authorities may have played a significant role in determining the extent to which the treaty's articles were implemented. It is essential to acknowledge that the overarching goal of the Berlin Treaty was to protect minority rights in Bulgarian territories, but the comprehensive and flawless execution of its provisions depended on the prevailing conditions of that era.

§ 2.6 The Principality of Bulgaria

Since the establishment of the Principality of Bulgaria, significant political, social, and cultural developments have taken place in the region, marking the beginning of a period characterized by Bulgarian national identity. First and foremost, the Principality of Bulgaria, with the help of the Russians, acquired a solid military organization and a strong army between 1878 and 1880.⁴⁵ In 1885, the Principality of Bulgaria expanded its territory by annexing Eastern Rumelia, and the unification of these two regions represented a much greater loss for the Ottoman Empire in terms of the previous socio-political situation.⁴⁶

45 Bıçaklı, *Türkiye-Bulgaristan İlişkileri*, 75.

46 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 25.

Secondly, during this period, Bulgaria adopted and established a constitutional monarchy, which was an important step towards the institutionalization of democratic governance in the country. The Tarnovo constitution and the 1879 Bulgarian constitutional assembly established a liberal political system in Bulgaria. The constitution, drafted by the Russian administration, contributed to the country's adoption of one of the most liberal electoral regimes of that time.⁴⁷ However, political parties lacked clear ideologies, and their leaders were not charismatic figures. They aligned themselves with external powers, with some being pro-Russian and the majority being pro-Western. In this context, Muslims, pragmatically supporting anti-Russian views, rallied behind both the Stambolovist and Radolovist branches of the National Liberal Party. Yet, voting was not an individual practice but a collective experience for Muslims. Notables were holding influence among the Muslim community but joining different parties, often leading them to the losing side. Muslim leaders were aware of their constitutional rights and sought to promote their involvement in parliamentary politics on following decades. Sultan Abdülhamid II personally took an interest in the participation of Bulgaria's Muslims in politics, viewing it as beneficial for their community.⁴⁸

Thirdly, the Bulgarian government implemented various reforms aimed at the country's modernization. These modernization efforts initially began with the declaration of the Tanzimat during the Ottoman period, under the governorship of Midhat Paşa in the Tuna province. However, the Bulgarian government attributed different meanings to the modernization, which included incorporating a homogeneous and national movement, breaking free from its old imperial roots. In Bulgaria's new modernization movement developed and strengthened infrastructure, education, healthcare, and judicial systems, while the goal of supporting Bulgarian identity remained a constant focus. After the war, the fields, vineyards, and gardens of the Turks were temporarily transferred

47 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 178.

48 *Ibid*, 179.

to the Russian interim government and then to the Bulgarian administration. By 1880, Bulgaria had over 30 urban development plans in place, but the aim of eliminating the Ottoman legacy resulted in mosques, vakıf buildings, and Muslim cemeteries to be demolished or repurposed. Especially due to conversions of vakıf properties meant destruction of financial resources of Muslims' schools, mosques, and madrasas.⁴⁹ Ironically, Muslims were still required to pay taxes for these destroyed or dismantled vakıf properties.⁵⁰

On the other hand, the 1877-78 War and the Berlin Treaty accelerated the transition to a "primitive capitalist regime based on private property and assumed free enterprise" in southeast Europe, as described by Karpát. Relative modern banking, communication, and taxation systems, along with various economic innovations, followed one another. The process of economic modernization that began during the Ottoman period gained significant momentum in the period following the Berlin Treaty.⁵¹ Jovanovic examines and provides in-depth observations on the two capitals of the Balkans, namely Sofia and Belgrade, in this context. Witnessing urban innovations during the Ottoman Empire, the Principality of Bulgaria period, and beyond, Sofia was thereby establishing an 'ideological' foundation extending from the capital to the entire country. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Sofia was a relatively insignificant administrative center within the Ottoman Empire, ranking fifth in terms of population as a medium-sized town. It lagged behind major port cities like Rusçuk and Varna, connected to the Eastern Railway owned by the French. Additionally, Sofia was smaller than cities such as Filibe and Şumnu, which were early industrial centers for textile, knitting, and rose oil production. Furthermore, it had the lowest urban population in the Tuna province, which marginalized Sofia, and rendered it a small regional

49 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 44.

50 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 85-86.

51 Karpát, *Balkanlarda Osmanlı Mirası ve Milliyetçilik*, 191.

center until the 1870s. However, with the establishment of an independent Bulgarian state in 1878, it expanded to become a central point for a broader region.⁵²

§ 2.7 Problems

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Tuna and Edirne provinces were among the most advanced regions economically. Ottoman Muslims living here were economically superior to the Bulgarians, as they owned 70% of the cultivable land.⁵³ Following 1878, as numerous Muslim landowners opted to sell their estates and migrate to the Ottoman Empire by following 1878, certain lands were left deserted. Besides, Muslims, who were able to return within a three-year period after the treaty, contributed to a shift in the dynamics of the land market by selling their properties. The availability of land at low prices prompted peasants to take out loans, resulting in the proliferation of this practice. Over time, there was an increasing demand for land. In Bulgaria, where agriculture prevailed, Bulgarian villagers resorted to pressuring their Muslim neighbors into selling or abandoning their lands through acts of aggression.⁵⁴ Although some were able to continue cultivating rice and tobacco, the Muslim landowner class in Bulgarian territories was nearly eradicated after 1878. Between 1879 and 1949, 80% of the Bulgarian Turks remained as small-scale farmers.⁵⁵

While it was generally believed that Christian properties were slightly larger than those owned by Muslims, the reality was that most large estates were in the hands of Muslims. Many Muslims who fled and entrusted their properties to Bulgarians returned to find that their properties had been sold at a fraction of their value. Crowds from mountain villages descended to settle in the vacant farms. The temporary Russian administration in northern Bulgaria encouraged the eviction process.

52 Jovanović, "Bourgeois Balkans," 24.

53 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 28.

54 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 95.

55 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 29.

Later, the restriction on migrant property ownership was lifted, and it was stated that those who had their properties confiscated and forcibly taken from them should be compensated. However, compensation was rarely provided. The lands held by migrating Muslims changed hands continuously. The lands were generally sold at low prices because the market was saturated. By 1888, land changed hands at about one-third of the price it held under Ottoman rule.⁵⁶ The liquidation process reduced the burdens on the peasantry and provided them with greater access to land. A portion of the income that had previously returned to commercial landowners was redistributed to laborers. As a result, the resources made available to peasants increased.⁵⁷

On the other hand, the evacuation of the Muslim population resulted in significant losses in both the quantity and quality of agricultural production. Observations from Eastern Rumelia indicate that Turks were practical farmers who worked more diligently and meticulously than other ethnic groups. As an example given by Palairret, the Filibe province used to export rice worth at least 13 to 14 million piastres annually and produce 500,000 to 600,000 kilograms of rice. But rice cultivation was suspended after the war. It was reintroduced under restrictive conditions in 1884 but later abandoned in over half of the agricultural lands due to high wages and exorbitant rents demanded by the administration.⁵⁸

The Bulgarian economy, freed from Ottoman Institutions, structurally converged with the Serbian economy. This was most notably evident in the presentation of agriculture, which aimed to decrease land productivity, reduce the importance of the urban sector, and eliminate rural industry. Both countries witnessed the emergence of predominantly rural economies focused on self-sufficiency. The decline of large-scale agricul-

56 Michael Palairret, *The Balkan Economies c.1800-1914: Evolution without development* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 175.

57 *Ibid*, 177-278.

58 *Ibid*, 185.

ture hindered market growth. The Bulgarian proto-industry left remnants that would eventually be replaced by factory production, but this sector was still insignificant.⁵⁹

Following the Berlin Treaty, Muslim migration to the Empire became a distinct feature of Ottoman life. Muslim Tatars had already been migrated in large groups to the empire due to the pressure exerted by the Russian Empire in the Caucasus, with an estimated 1.2 million refugees arriving. After the losses in Central Europe and the pressures on Muslim peasants, approximately one million refugees sought asylum in the empire, and only half a million returned. All of these events reinforced anti-Christian sentiments among Muslims all over the world, which, among the other factors, strengthened the national clashes in the following decades.⁶⁰ Although the Berlin Treaty guaranteed equal rights for all inhabitants on both sides, its provisions were not strictly followed and the refugee crisis remained a great problem. Particularly in Eastern Rumelia, issues of land ownership were intertwined with the sovereignty problems of the Ottoman Empire and the newly established border region. During this period, the multifaceted interaction of political, social, and economic factors provide insights into the complex nature of land relations in the Ottoman Balkans.⁶¹

The Porte attempted to make some arrangements for Bulgarians and refugees to return to their own lands, but some of those who managed to return were forced to sell their properties at ultralow prices and returned to Ottoman cities. According to the data provided by Karpat, the total value of the lands sold or disposed of by Muslims returning or migrating to Turkey reached 108 million kuruş between 1879 and 1883.⁶² A significant number of Muslim small-scale farmers, artisans, and traders in Bulgaria were either expelled from their properties or forced to sell them and migrate to Turkey. It can be said that alongside social factors, there

59 *Ibid*, 202.

60 Erik Jan Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016), 128.

61 Mirkova, *Muslim Land, Christian Labor*, 71.

62 Karpat, *Balkanlarda Osmanlı Mirası ve Milliyetçilik*, 193.

was a national-ethnic motivation at play. Indeed, the ideology of the newly established nation-state in Bulgaria aimed to construct a “national bourgeoisie,” Bulgaria desired its national bourgeoisie to be Bulgarian either ethnically or as loyal citizens accepting the hegemony of the Bulgarian state. As Karpat states, “social transformation and the journey towards a national state accompanied and completed each other in terms of spiritual meaning and ideological perspective.”⁶³

Another problem was about demolished Muslim buildings, especially the public ones. It is known that between 1877 and 1878, 938 Muslim houses, mosques, and madrasas were demolished in the Tatarpazarcığı district of Filibe. In the central district of Filibe, out of the existing 29 schools and madrasas, only 2 remained standing in 1879, while the rest were completely destroyed.⁶⁴ The Russo-Ottoman War was a disaster for educational buildings of Turks, as well. Approximately 1,500 Muslim schools were destroyed, and many Muslim teachers migrated. Until 1886, finding and training teachers was a major problem. According to the school censuses of the 1894-1898 academic year, it is observed that most Muslim teachers in Bulgaria were elderly. Out of 1,500 teachers, 703 had completed primary school, and 550 had graduated from madrasas. There were 132 teachers who had completed secondary education (rüşdiye).⁶⁵

As the vakıf properties were plundered, the income source of Muslim schools also shrank, and the salaries of Muslim teachers were quite low.⁶⁶ In the face of these problems, the Bulgarian Commissioner referred to Article 5 of the Berlin Treaty and sought assistance from the major powers, but little response was received.⁶⁷ The Grand Mufti of Bulgaria was responsible for supervising Muslim schools and maintaining connections with the homeland.⁶⁸ During this period, Turkish-language press had a

63 *Ibid*, 193.

64 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 44.

65 *Ibid*, 49.

66 *Ibid*, 32.

67 *Ibid*, 44.

68 *Ibid*, 54.

significant influence on Turkish education in Bulgaria. Some Young Turks who had fled from the Ottoman Empire established newspapers in Bulgaria, and out of the 44 newspapers published in Bulgaria between 1878 and 1908, 25 served as the mouthpiece of the Young Turk cause, and many of these publications addressed the problems that Muslim population of Bulgaria faced.⁶⁹ In that period, newspapers became tools of discussing the Muslim culture, education, progression, and of learning about the problems that other Muslim communities faced all over the world. Newspapers became a platform that provided a collective representation of the common challenging experiences faced by Muslims worldwide.

The muftis were not just a religious institution, since they served a political purpose as well. They represented the Islamic community and functioned as other government offices in Bulgaria. But the pathologies of government offices, such as violence in competition, malicious negligence, illegal dismissals, and appointments, were also present in the mufti offices. This was not only a fault in mentality but also a result of the immaturity of democratic institutions in Bulgaria. Both Muslims and Christians had become accustomed to the autocratic rule of corrupt sultans or paşas.⁷⁰

§ 2.8 Struggle for Ottoman Domination

2.8.1 *Ottoman Attempts for Internal Domination*

After the Berlin Treaty of 1877-78, the Ottoman Empire lost approximately one-third of its territory and around 20% of its total population.⁷¹ Sultan Abdülhamid II governed the empire through a 30-year autocratic regime after indefinitely suspending the Meclis-i Umumi (General Assembly) due to a state of emergency. During Abdülhamid's centralist absolutist regime, significant advancements were made in communication

69 *Ibid*, 55.

70 Popek, "The Functioning of the Mufti Institution," 230.

71 Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi*, 127.

and education throughout the empire.⁷² This period contained elements of continuity with the Tanzimat era but also exhibited certain contradictions. Zürcher emphasizes that both perspectives have some validity from different angles. For example, developments indicating the continuity of reforms include the improvement of telegraph lines connecting Istanbul to the European system, the enhancement of communication between the central government and the provinces, the expansion of the railway network through investments in the empire, the integration of certain sectors of the Ottoman economy with the capitalist system through steamships and railways, the increase in the capacity to educate trained personnel at various bureaucratic levels starting from the 1880s, and a noticeable increase in the number of schools and teachers until 1895. Additionally, the emergence of more professional newspapers compared to the 1860s and the wider reach of newspapers, such as the annual appearance of 9 to 10 new magazines in Istanbul between 1876 and 1888, demonstrate the vibrancy of cultural activities.⁷³

On the other hand, Sultan established a system in which a network of communication expanded between the center and the provinces, encouraging individuals at all levels to report on each other's activities. This intensive communication system within the empire further exacerbated bribery and favoritism at lower levels and prioritized loyalty in the employment of personnel in government offices. As a result, some government offices became ineffective in carrying out their duties.⁷⁴

The emergence of the private Ottoman press earlier on had forced the Ottoman government to control the press through laws. This began with the introduction of the *Kararname-i Ali* in 1867. Despite being silenced through various methods, journalists made efforts to express their ideas beyond the borders of the empire.⁷⁵ Actually, the Ottoman Constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*) stated that the press was free within the framework of

72 Taglia, *Intellectuals and Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 4.

73 Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi*, 122-124.

74 *Ibid*, 126-127.

75 Erol Baykal, "The Ottoman Press (1908-1923)," PhD Dissertation, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2013), 27.

the law, and indeed, in the first few years, the freedom of the press was untouched. However, in the following years, pressure on newspapers gradually increased. In 1881, the 'Encümen-i Teftiş ve Muayene Müdürlüğü' was established, followed by the establishment of the Tetkik-i Müellefat Commission under the Ministry of Education. In 1888, a pre-censorship system was implemented for all printing activities, which meant that all printed documents had to obtain permission before being published. As a result of these developments, there was a significant decrease in the number of newspapers being published.⁷⁶

The press became a tool to strengthen the legitimacy of Sultan Abdülhamid II. An examination of a total of 147 publications published between 1861 and 1908 revealed that, starting from 1885 until the second constitutional revolution in 1908, most of the new publications expressed gratitude to Sultan Abdülhamid II in their first issues. In 44 out of 76 prefaces from 1885 to 1907, Sultan was explicitly mentioned and thanked.⁷⁷ The censorship implemented in 1888 extinguished the vitality of the press. The discussion of ideas criticizing the regime was banned. During this period, any element in the world press, theater stages, or all other public forums that could depict an unfavorable image of Sultan Abdülhamid's reputation or the policies he pursued was attempted to be neutralized.⁷⁸

2.8.2 *Ottoman Attempts for External Domination*

From the Berlin Treaty in 1878 until Bulgaria declared its full independence in 1908, the Ottoman Empire used various strategies to increase its theoretical and practical dominance over Bulgarian territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After the Russo-Ottoman War, the Ottoman Empire turned into a weak but resisting force in the Tuna and Edirne provinces. However, Sultan Abdülhamid II made efforts to

76 Sincer, "Edhem Ruhi ve Balkan Gazetesi," 54.

77 Baykal, "The Ottoman Press," 25.

78 Selim Deringil, *İktidarın Sembolleri ve İdeoloji: II. Abdülhamid Dönemi (1876-1909)* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2014), 28.

maintain his influence in the region and used various strategies. One famous policy of Abdülhamid II was intelligence gathering and the use of spies, which also became widespread in Bulgaria during this period. The Bulgarian Commission, which claimed to represent Ottoman authority in the Eastern Rumelian Province, became the intermediary of Ottoman dominance in the region.

The institution of commissionership, which emerged in the late nineteenth century and was observed in both Egypt and Bulgaria, was established by the Ottoman administration to protect the rights of the Ottoman population in the 'autonomous' territories.⁷⁹ As Mahir Aydın explains, until the internal regulation of the Principality of Bulgaria was prepared, it would be administered by a Russian commissioner, and during this process, a group consisting of the Ottoman commissioner and consuls from England, France, Russia, Germany, Austria, Italy, Greece, Romania, and Serbia would assist the Russian commissioner for a period not exceeding nine months. At the end of the process, the presence of the Ottoman commissioner was portrayed as if he would only deal with Turkish foundations, and the existence and status of the commissionership continued in the region without being clearly defined.⁸⁰

The commissionership primarily dealt with the supervision of mosques and foundation properties in Bulgaria. In addition, the commissioners were involved in political affairs and endeavored to pursue policies that served Ottoman interests. Bulgarian commissioners dealt with issues such as the Macedonian issue, the acceptance of Muslim people who had to leave their homes back to their former homeland, the resolution of political issues arising from the annexation of Eastern Rumelia Province, the extradition of criminals, incidents at the borders, the registration of real estate and inheritance matters of Muslim individuals who

79 "For an insightful discussion, see Aimee M. Genell, "Autonomous Provinces and the Problem of 'Semi-Sovereignty' in European International Law," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* (2016), 18:6, 534,

80 Aydın, "Bulgaristan Komiserliği," 73.

were scattered and forced to migrate towards Anatolia or settled elsewhere, as well as those who lost their lives during the process. Bulgarian Commissaries had to be Muslim, have the capacity to resolve real estate issues related to state-owned, foundation, and private lands in Bulgaria, and be knowledgeable about the general politics of the period.⁸¹

2.8.3 *The Ottoman Empire's Imperial Endeavors and Bulgaria's National Endeavors*

The Young Turks, who were influenced by liberal and constitutional ideas and the previous generation of Young Ottomans, established the first organized opposition group in 1889, and they were primarily students of schools like Mülkiye and Harbiye.⁸² The Sultan actively struggled against the members of the society while some were fleeing abroad to avoid arrest and others were either detained or sent into internal exile. The Young Turks, who aimed to reinstate the the Ottoman Constitution (Kanun-i Esasi) remained active until 1922, advocating for the full endorsement of the rule of law and the reintroduction of the constitutional system.⁸³ The Young Turks who lived as fugitives in other countries and especially in Principality of Bulgaria were closely monitored by the central administration since they were opposed to the Sultan. The Sultan expanded his spy network to prevent those who had dethroned Sultans successfully before from launching a movement against himself. Hence, he utilized his authority and intelligence, gathered strategies, stayed informed about everything, and closely monitored the activities of the Young Turks in Bulgaria. In this regard, he benefited significantly from the Bulgarian Commission and particularly from Necib Melhame Paşa.

Necib Melhame, who was appointed as the Bulgarian Commissioner in 1898, despite not fulfilling the primary requirement of being a Muslim, gained the trust of the Sultan and was loyal to the Ottoman regime.⁸⁴ One

81 Ibid.

82 Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi*, 136.

83 Taglia, *Intellectuals and Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 29

84 Emine Taşkın, "Necib Melhame Paşa'nın siyasi hayatı (1856-1927)," Master Thesis, Marmara University, 2019, 2.

of the most trusted generals during the reign of Abdülhamid II, Melhame had already gained the Sultan's trust through his duty in Egypt. He played a pioneering role in the establishment of the spy network in 1880. Necib Melhame also gained the Sultan's appreciation during his mission in Paris by convincing many students in Europe to return to Istanbul as loyal citizens of the government.⁸⁵

When Necib Melhame started his duty in 1898, it was difficult to speak of the influence of the Ottoman governmental influence in Bulgaria, but yet the Empire sought for it. While in a diplomatic struggle with European states and Russia, various revolutionary committees were also actively operating on the territory. Bulgarians, like other Balkan peoples, were still considering under which country's protection they should pursue their independence goals.⁸⁶ On the other hand, according to the official Ottoman statistical books, Bulgaria was listed as an autonomous province, but its unique status was highlighted by placing it separately. Even after Eastern Rumelia became part of the Principality of Bulgaria in 1885, it was continued to be considered as an autonomous Ottoman province. Although Ferdinand was acknowledged as the prince of Bulgaria, the Ottoman press referred to him as the governor of Eastern Rumelia, which caused dissatisfaction among Bulgarian officials.⁸⁷ The Bulgarians sought to establish their authority and showcase their sovereignty over the state. They rejected foreign representatives who held letters of introduction to the Ottoman government rather than the Bulgarian government. They required Austro-Hungarian ships in Bulgarian waters to fly the Bulgarian flag and instructed foreign diplomats not to wear fezzes. Furthermore, they emphasized Bulgaria's distinctive position compared to neighboring Balkan countries, underscoring that Bulgaria's establishment through an international conference was considered a more legitimate compared to Serbia and Romania, which were founded through a sultanic decree.⁸⁸

85 Ibid, 21.

86 Ibid, 31.

87 Ibid, 36.

88 Ibid, 36.

§ 2.9 New Bulgarian and Muslim Identities

To understand nationalist and independence movements, it is necessary to analyze the broad historical context. It is also important to examine the problems the Ottoman Empire faced in governing the Tuna provinces at the beginning of the nineteenth century and its responses to these challenges. The issues and search for solutions explained earlier shed light about the Tuna and Edirne provinces during this period. There was unrest due to weak central authority, military losses, and active armed groups (*çetes*) in the region. Furthermore, nationalist uprisings in the future would have sought roots from the cultural awakening, national roots, national myths, and would have interpreted past events through the lens of the nation-state.

The wave of nationalism was a significant and an obvious factor alongside all the sociopolitical factors that gave a shape to the nineteenth century. The second half of the century witnessed the rise of nationalist sentiments among non-Muslim populations such as Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, and Romanians. After the establishment of the Principality of Bulgaria, two concepts of the nation existed within the Bulgarian imagination. One concept encompassed a broader civic-based nation, known as the Bulgarian 'narod' or people, which included all residents of the country regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or culture. They were considered citizens of the same homeland, bound by civic loyalty, and entitled to equal rights under the law. This inclusive notion of the nation was reflected in legislation and frequently invoked by government officials, intellectuals, and patriots in their communications with various audiences, foreign officials, and discussions related to legislation. It encompassed diverse nationalities such as Bulgarians, Turks, Jews, Greeks, and Roma, all of whom enjoyed equal individual rights, just like the Young Ottomans embraced all *millets* with the Ottoman identity during the Tanzimat Period.⁸⁹ However, Bulgaria faced challenges in nation-building and governing a country with a significant non-Bulgarian population.

89 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 49.

During its early years, Bulgaria prioritized asserting independence and developing a unique national identity separate from the Ottoman Empire. This nation-building process and Bulgarian aspirations exhibited an anti-Ottoman character, which carried both internal and external dimensions.⁹⁰

To understand the internal dimension of Bulgarian period, one should compare and contrast the Tanzimat 'modernization' and the subsequent reforms undertaken by the national state of Bulgaria after gaining autonomy. Both modernization periods aimed to address the region's needs, displaying a continuity when viewed from an ideological perspective but the reforms during the Tanzimat era were carried out under the framework of a supra-Ottoman identity, while the post-1878 reforms were under the umbrella of the Bulgarian national state. Although there seems to be continuity when examined solely on a physical level, a significant rupture is evident at the ideological level. The modernization and development movement that began in the 1830s turned into a profound ideological rupture. The Tanzimat reforms aimed to build, restore, and revitalize the imperial legacy of the Ottoman Empire, while the Bulgarian national reforms sought to create a new identity by erasing the Ottoman imperial past. Progress and development were associated with the Ottoman identity politics during the Tanzimat era, whereas in post-1878 Bulgaria, the restructuring process aligned with the ideology of the nation-state, as Jovanovic also mentioned, creating a synthesis of development, progress, and national myth in Sofia.⁹¹

On the external dimensions of the nation-building process, there was a desire to expand the Bulgarian state to include Macedonia and Thrace, which were under Ottoman control. The Macedonian and Thracian issues became prominent since the 1890s, and in addition to the Ottoman Empire, Greece and Serbia also played influential roles in the regional politics. The events in Macedonia would shape Bulgarian nationalism and

90 *Ibid*, 35.

91 Jovanović, "Bourgeois Balkans," 6.

have a decisive impact on Bulgaria's future attitude towards Muslims, as well.⁹²

In the new context of Bulgaria, nationalism and the definition of 'self' became clearer as they defined the boundaries of what they were not. The population living within those boundaries found themselves in a state of being 'outside' despite physically residing within Bulgarian borders. They held a status of being part of a group that was within Bulgaria but felt outside in terms of identity. For Bulgarian Muslim intellectuals who found themselves in the midst of existential anxiety, education and the social context played a crucial role in shaping and preserving their national identity. *Kiraathanes* (coffeehouses) served as gathering places for discussions and planning, while theaters were considered institutions that imparted moral values and patriotism, and were associated with reform efforts. Turkish and Muslim intellectuals in Bulgaria engaged in publishing articles, participating in public debates, and critiquing both Ottoman and Bulgarian politics. They presented Islam as morally superior and praised constitutionalism by referencing hadiths (the sayings of the Prophet), and saw the constitution as the only way of Empire's salvation. Their emphasis on modern sciences and positive knowledge was influenced by the ideas of the Young Turks.⁹³

92 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 34.

93 See Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*.

Ali Fehmi and Intellectuals in Autonomous Bulgaria

The Imperial School of Medicine (Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Şahane) served as the birthplace of the first organized opposition against the Sultan, which later evolved into the Young Turk movement. The foundations of the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) were laid on June 2, 1889, by students attending to the military medical college, and it quickly spread among the students of the school and later in other educational institutions. The founding members were İbrahim Temo (1865-1939), an Albanian from Macedonia, İshak Sukuti (1868-1903), a Jew born in Diyarbakır, Mehmet Reşid (1873-1919) from the Caucasus, and Abdullah Cevdet (1869-1932) of Kurdish origin. They met on July 2, 1889.¹

After the first investigation into the society was launched in 1894, Abdülhamid II considered these activities as a student incident and pardoned them. However, in 1895, the society sought to expand its activities by gaining the support of prominent religious scholars (*ulema*). Ahmed Rıza, a staunch positivist, was making serious plans for the organization

1 Taglia, *Intellectuals and Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 29.

and the political course the society would follow.² By 1895, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) had established its central branch in Istanbul, as well as two external branches in Paris and Cairo. The following year, a wave of arrests led to the voluntary exile of many Young Turks. Consequently, a gradual immigration of Young Turks abroad took place, as they concluded that political activities within the empire became increasingly difficult to pursue.³ As a result of the fugitives, the Young Turks became more knowledgeable about the civil society in the West, established contacts with members of the European intelligentsia, and broadened their horizons regarding organizational activities.⁴ Murad Bey published *Mizan* newspaper first in Egypt and later in Geneva. Ahmed Rıza published *Meşveret* newspaper in Paris, Geneva, and Brussels. The *Ottoman* newspaper was published in Geneva, London, and Folkstone, while *Vatan* newspaper was published in Athens. Despite being a non-profit profession, new publications and the continuation of the Young Turk struggle can be observed during this period. Particularly in Bulgaria, the Young Turks took advantage of the free intellectual environment and engaged in publications promoting liberty. Their publications between 1895 and 1908 adopted an anti-despotist stance and maintained communication with each other. *Meşveret* newspaper became CUP's publication organ in 1895, and the official administrative center was set in Paris at the beginning of 1896. Mizancı Murad, who had fled abroad and established contacts with England and France, revitalized the Cairo branch of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in late December 1895. By 1896, in addition to CUP centers in Paris, Geneva, Istanbul, and Cairo, other branches were established in Ankara, Beirut, Edirne, Hama, Homs, Damascus, Tripoli, Izmir, Trabzon, and Tripolitania. The organization also formed branches in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, Romania, as well as

2 M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, "İttihat ve Terakkî Cemiyeti", in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (İstanbul: TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2001). <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ittihat-ve-terakki-cemiyeti> (July 18, 2023).

3 Taglia, *Intellectuals and Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 42.

4 *Ibid*, 35.

Bulgaria, where the activities concentrated specifically in Köstendil, Filibe, Lom, Hacıoğlupazarcığı,⁵ Rusçuk, Tutrakan, Varna, Vidin, and Yanbolu.⁶

The efforts of the Young Turks between 1889 and 1902 did not produce tangible results.⁷ During this period, due to the increasing number of individuals fleeing abroad, particularly to the Balkans, a kind of local Young Turk movement emerged in the Balkan region as a result of these fugitives.⁸ According to the Young Turks in the region, the hardships faced by Bulgarian Muslims resembled the experiences of Muslims worldwide: they were all under oppression, limited educational opportunities left them ignorant, and they were victims of corrupt religious leaders.⁹ In the early 1890s, while the number of direct committee members or active participants in Young Turk activities in Bulgaria was limited, almost all intellectuals were influenced by the ideas of the Young Turk. Rather than striving to overthrow Sultan Abdülhamid II, they preferred to discuss the developments in the Ottoman Empire through their publications. However, Muslims observed a clear weakness and felt abandoned by the only power that could protect them, leading to concerns about their future.¹⁰

On the other hand, when the activities of the society members involved in planning a coup in 1896 and 1897 were exposed, the government intervened, resulting in a significant decline in the domestic activities of the

5 “The town mentioned, known as Hacıoğlu Pazarcık, Hacıoğlu Pazarı, or Pazarcık in various sources, is now known as Dobrich. It was established in the 16th century as an Ottoman town in the inland region of Dobruja (...)” Machiel Kiel, “Hacıoğlupazarcığı”, in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (İstanbul: TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2020). <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/hacioglupazarcigi>, (July 18, 2023).

6 Hancıoğlu, “İttihat ve Terakkî Cemiyeti.”

7 Hancıoğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 4.

8 Hancıoğlu, *Bir Siyasal Örgüt Olarak*, 263.

9 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 126.

10 *Ibid*, 127.

society.¹¹ On July 20, 1897, Mizancı Murad was convinced to return to Istanbul.¹² Two days later, the Paris Embassy announced that the fugitives who were planning to return to the country would be pardoned. According to the agreement between the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and the government, the Sultan would enact the requested reforms, declare a general amnesty, and halt all forms of Young Turk publications.¹³

§ 3.1 The Turkish Press in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, there was an effort to contribute to the development and progress of the local Muslims driven by existential concerns, and this effort was reflected in Young Turk publications that featured a similar rhetoric. Notably, figures such as Ali Fehmi, Tahir Lütfü, and Mehmed Masum took significant steps in adapting the Unionist ideology to the local context.¹⁴ In fact, the roots of Turkish-language periodicals in Bulgaria date back to the Tanzimat period. Under his provincial rule, Midhat Paşa established in 1865 a provincial printing house in the city of Rusçuk, which was once the cultural center of the Turkish-speaking Muslim people along the Tuna. The first Turkish-language newspaper, named *Tuna* (Danube) was largely official in character, began to be published in two languages, Turkish and Bulgarian, twice a week, and continued to be published uninterrupted until the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78.¹⁵

Following the establishment of the Principality of Bulgaria and the suspension of the parliament in the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria became the source of Turkish-language publications, especially due to the restrictions imposed on opposition publications in the empire. During this period, regime opponents who fled from the empire could continue their

11 Hanioğlu, “İttihat ve Terakkî Cemiyeti.”

12 Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasî Fikirleri*, 141.

13 Hanioğlu, “İttihat ve Terakkî Cemiyeti.”

14 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 126.

15 Harun Bekir, “XIX. Yüzyıldan Günümüze Kadar Filibe’de Türkçe Basın”, *Balkanlarda Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Araştırmaları* 3(2), 223.

journalistic activities freely in Bulgaria, which contributed to the development of Turkish-language press. In Bulgaria, the first Muslim magazines emerged through the initiative of Bulgarian authorities. For example, Yusuf Ali, who settled in Bulgaria after the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War, gained the trust of Bulgarians by translating the Bulgarian constitution into Ottoman Turkish and was appointed to the publication of *Tarla*, the country's first Muslim newspaper. Prince Battenberg believed that such an initiative could serve the Muslim population.¹⁶ *Tarla*, published for six months in 1882, was released in Ottoman Turkish and Bulgarian. Yusuf Ali later published a newspaper called *Nadas*, followed by *Dikkat*, which was published intermittently until 1886. Yusuf Ali, lastly, published *İttifak* in 1894 and immigrated to the Ottoman Empire a few years afterward.¹⁷

Methodieva emphasizes that such initiatives should not be seen solely as means of increasing the loyalty of Muslim citizens to the Bulgarian state.¹⁸ Although they were not able to have complete freedom of publication, these newspapers were valuable platforms for discussing the problems faced by Muslims. In Eastern Rumelia, *Hilal* (1883-1885), which discussed provincial issues, and *Varna Postası* (1887-1888) and *Serbest Bulgaristan* (1888-1889), both published by Necib Nadir, a secondary school teacher in Varna, are important examples among Muslim newspapers. These newspapers, which carefully expressed their criticisms, were followed by a period in which no Muslim newspaper was published after 1889. At this point, Stambolov's insistence to have cordial relations with the Ottoman sultan, alongside his own political interests, also had an influence in the decrease of publications by the local Muslims.¹⁹

By the mid-1890s, a new era of publishing began in Bulgaria. Muslim reformists in Bulgaria benefited from the independent Muslim press and the liberalization of the Bulgarian political environment starting from the

16 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 104.

17 *Ibid*, 105.

18 *Ibid*.

19 *Ibid*, 106.

mid-1890s. Between 1894 and 1908, twenty-seven Muslim newspapers emerged, while a total of 44 Turkish newspapers and magazines were published in Bulgaria between 1880 and 1908, with 25 of them being Young Turk publications.²⁰ In the period after 1890, half of the newspapers were aligned with the Young Turks, while the remaining newspapers emphasized their loyalty to the Sultan in various ways.²¹ Furthermore, it is known that 12 of these newspapers were published in Filibe during this period, including the *Muvazene* newspaper, which belonged to Ali Fehmi, one of the most important figures of the “minor Young Turk” group.²²

Filibe and Rusçuk emerged as centers of Muslim journalism, with Filibe eventually gaining a reputation as the capital of Muslim journalism.²³ From 1890s, the newspapers were entirely personal initiatives of Muslim intellectuals and reflected their observations, suggestions, and the social experiences of Muslims in the region.²⁴ In the first issue of *Muvazene*, Ali Fehmi mentioned that there were great opportunities in Filibe for practicing the profession of journalism, such as roads, telegraphs, mails, telephones, and radio. European and Istanbul telegraphs passed through Filibe, and agency telegraphs were made available for free use. The city library provided free access to the most famous political, scientific, pedagogical, and statistical publications from all around the world.²⁵

20 Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 329.

21 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 106.

22 Hanoğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 50.

23 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 107.

24 *Ibid.*

25 “Mesele-i Maruzatımız,” *Muvazene*, 1. Sayı, 20 Ağustos 1313 (1 Eylül 1897), 1. “Among these explanations, it is stated that Filibe’s proximity to the world is most beneficial for *Muvazene*. European and Istanbul telegrams pass through Filibe daily, and agency telegrams are also made available to the public in coffeehouses and music halls without any charge. Therefore, there is an added convenience in *Muvazene*’s affairs related to Filibe. [Bu izahat arasında Filibe’nin dünyaya en yakın bulunması *Muvazene*’ye en ziyade faideli olduğunu varest-i izahatdır. Avrupa ve İstanbul telgrafları günlük Filibe’den geçmekde, kahveden ma’da gazinolarda da ajans telgrafları ehlinin bilâ ücret nazar-ı istifadelerine konulmakda olduğundan *Muvazene*’ye aid mesailde bir kat daha suhulet hasıl olmaktadır.]”

The journals that were loyal to Abdülhamid II refrained from making critical publications, while also avoiding to reference the opposition's newspapers. One of the most famous examples was Rıza Paşa, who published the renowned *Gayret* newspaper. Launching the *Gayret* newspaper in 1895, Rıza Paşa had initially operated it without censorship and was among the reformist journalists. In 1898, however, he aligned with the Sultan, abandoned opponent publishing, and was rewarded by Ottoman officials. Rıza Paşa, in terms of its extended publishing duration, had become a competitor to *Muvazene*. Despite occasional divisions, *Gayret* continued to be published until 1902. In contrast to the publications sympathetic to the Sultan, the first reformist publication, *Sebat* (1895-96), was published in Rusçuk. The most influential reformist newspaper was *Muvazene* (1897-1905), published by Ali Fehmi, a graduate of Mekteb-i Mülkiye. The first Muslim daily newspaper, *Tuna*, along with its weekly publication *Uhuvvet*, and the daily *Balkan* became the spokespersons of reformist publishing in the region and played a significant role in increasing social awareness along with *Muvazene*. After the closure of *Muvazene* in 1905, the other journals continued the legacy of reform.²⁶ For instance, Mehmed Sabri, the brother of Ali Fehmi, built upon the legacy of *Muvazene* by publishing a newspaper titled *Ahali*.

The Ottoman-language press in Bulgaria played a significant role in shaping the mindset of local Muslims. Prominent intellectuals associated with the Young Turk ideas felt a similar responsibility to find a solution to the challenging conditions experienced by the Muslim community. One such intellectual was Ali Fehmi, who, as argued by Methodieva, was a major critic of the Ottoman regime during that time in the region, and his biography was one of the most important of the period.²⁷

On the other hand, the sole motivation behind journalism activities in the region was not just to freely oppose the regime. Journalism, as a subset of cultural activities, served as a confirmation of the national existence of Muslims and Turks who remained as minorities in Bulgaria. Many

26 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 108.

27 See Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*.

Turkish publications in Bulgaria addressed common themes such as the education, economic situation, health, and problems faced by Muslims worldwide. These publications not only informed the Muslim minorities about global developments, but also published articles about social problems that Muslims were facing, passages in which readers shared their ideas or advices about such problems, depending on the publisher's initiative.

The Ottoman authorities were able to regulate the officially approved journals that circulated within the empire. However, their control over the Muslim press in Bulgaria was inherently restricted. Meanwhile, the Bulgarians were not reluctant to leverage local Muslim publications for negotiation. Faced with this situation, Ottoman officials employed diverse tactics to suppress dissenting publications. They would offer financial incentives to editors of opposing newspapers to cease publication, extend assistance to compliant publications adhering to censorship rules, and permit the circulation of such newspapers within the empire.²⁸

This was the context in which Ali Fehmi emerged as one of the most important figures of the "minor Young Turk" group in Bulgaria.²⁹ The appearance of his journal *Muvazene* gave momentum to the oppositional activities in the country. The journal emerged as the main platform for debating Muslim affairs, and many Muslims looked to it for guidance and advice. In turn, Ali Fehmi, well aware of its significance, cast himself as a new kind of intellectual and political leader.³⁰ Ali Fehmi, who was born in Filibe and had lived within the borders of the Ottoman Empire in his professional life after the Treaty of Berlin, was dismissed from his position due to his proximity to the opposition. After returning to Filibe, he was not given any job in government offices. Therefore, he decided to engage in publishing.

28 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 105.

29 Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 50.

30 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 107.

§ 3.2 The Biography of Ali Fehmi

To understand the life story of Ali Fehmi and his interactions with the Young Turks through *Muvazene* newspaper, it is important to provide his detailed biography and gain a good understanding of both his relationships with Ottoman officials and his position among the Young Turks. In addition to biographical information gleaned from the Ottoman archival materials, the details of Ali Fehmi's life story emerges out of the pages of *Muvazene* newspaper, which was regularly published between 1897 and 1905 but drew government's reaction due to its content and Ali Fehmi's suspicious activities.³¹ Ali Fehmi, who was a Muslim Ottoman subject, was the son of Kızanlıklı Ahmet Faik Hacı Şaban Ağazade Mehmed Ağa. His younger brother's name was Mehmed Sabri, who was two years younger than him.³²

Ali Fehmi was born in 1871. During the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War, Ali Fehmi and his family migrated to Istanbul due to the defeat suffered in their homeland. After the signing of the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, they returned to Filibe, which was within the newly established autonomous province of Rumeli-i Şarki (Eastern Rumelia). Ali Fehmi completed his education at a local secondary school (rüşdiye) and graduated from the Mülkiye School in Istanbul in 1889.³³ Throughout the rest of his life, Ali Fehmi was referred to himself with the title of his graduation, and "one of the graduates of Mülkiye School" (Mekteb-i Mülkiye Mezunlarından) became a standard addition to his byline following each article he wrote.

After graduating from Mülkiye School, Ali Fehmi began his career as a teacher. For eight years, he served as a teacher and school principal in Anatolia under the Ottoman rule. While teaching at Gelibolu High School (Gelibolu İdadisi), he was promoted and started his duty at Kırkkilise

31 *Muvazene's* last issue was published in 1911 but its regular weekly publication period included the years between 1897-1905. *Muvazene*, 5 Teşrinievvel 1327.

32 Karagöz, *Bulgaristan Türk Basını*.

33 *Ibid*, 120.

High School (Kırkkilise İdadi Mektebi) in 1892.³⁴ According to the information provided by Mesut Ayar, Ali Fehmi was appointed as the school principal at Kırkkilise School as a result of a promotion. Teaching staff for the 1894-95 academic year shows that in addition to his role as a school principal, he was also responsible for teaching French, sciences (Malumat-ı Fenniye), and accounting (Usul-i Defteri).³⁵ Originally, Kırkkilise School, which began providing education in the late 1860s, was initially established as a secondary school (rüşdiye). In the year Ali Fehmi started his duty in 1892, the curriculum changed, and it was transformed into a high school (idadi). However, the students, most of the teachers, and the building remained the same.³⁶

It appears that Ali Fehmi did not stay in his position in Kırkkilise for long. Upon realizing that an investigation was being conducted against him in October 1894, he was forced to resign from his position due to the allegations directed at him about six months later.³⁷ Indeed, during his tenure at Kırkkilise School, it was claimed and reflected in archival documents that he showed negligence in matters of religion, failed to satisfy the students, and engaged in inappropriate behavior:

Ali Fehmi, as a native of Filibe, initially began his educational journey at the prestigious Imperial Civil School (Mektebi Mülkiye-i Şahane) under the shadow of the government's support for education. However, during his time at the Kırkkilise School (Kırkkilise Mekteb-i İdadisi), due to negligence in religious matters and certain misconducts that could disappoint his fellow countrymen, he was dismissed from there. After a while, he arrived in Filibe, where he made efforts to preserve his original circle and subsequently took up teaching positions.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Mesut Ayar, "Kırklareli (Kırkkilise) Mekteb-i İdadisi" *History Studies*, Volume 2/3, 2010, 48.

36 Ayar, "Kırklareli (Kırkkilise) Mekteb-i İdadisi," 48.

37 *Ibid.*

Later, he was appointed as the director of Ankara School (Ankara Mekteb-i İdadisi).³⁸

Upon his return from Filibe, he was appointed as the principal of Ankara High School (Ankara Mekteb-i İdadisi). However, he could not stay in this position for long, either, as his career was disrupted due to his involvement in a fire incident at the school.³⁹ He was compelled to resign from Ankara School in a distressed manner and, despite later being proven innocent, he was not assigned to any official position for a period of eight months despite his efforts and applications, which finally forced him to return to his family home in Filibe in 1896. Despite being a talented teacher, his job applications to schools in Filibe also remained unanswered.⁴⁰ In July 1897, Ali Fehmi wrote a petition to the Bulgarian Commissioner's Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bulgaristan Komiserliği Kitabet-i Vekalet-i Behiyyesi) in Filibe, in which he expressed his life's turning point. In this petition, he stated that as a resident of Filibe, within the framework of the rights granted to him by the public law in Bulgaria, he could publish a newspaper called *Muvazene* and earn a

38 BOA, HR.SFR.04., 453/25/4, M-14-01-1905.

39 BOA, Y.PRK.MK., 7/78/1. H-06-02-1315

40 *"I am a native of Filibe and a graduate of the prestigious Imperial Civil School. I served as a teacher and school director for eight years, fulfilling my duties diligently. However, during my last official position in Ankara, an unfortunate fire incident occurred, leading to my dismissal. Although the hardship I faced was evident and undeniable, I found myself in a difficult situation when it came to securing another position due to various challenging circumstances. As a result, after enduring hardships for eight months, I was compelled to seek refuge with my parents in Filibe (...)* [Acizlerin Filibe ahalisinden ve millet-i Mekteb-i Mülkiye-i Şahane mezunlarından olup sekiz sene müddet muallimlik ve mektep müdürlüğüyle ifa-yı hizmet etmiş ve son memuriyet-i acizanem olan Ankara'da her nasılsa zuhur eden bir yangın sebebiyle maduren infisal etmiş ve her ne kadar mağduriyet-i harime-i çakeranem tebeyyün ve tahakkuk etmiş ise de tekrar bir memuriyete kayırılmaklığım hususunda düçar-ı müşkşilat-ı adîde olduğuma rağmen sekiz mah müddet ve son derece sebat neticesinde hal-i çakeraneme münasip bir hizmetle kayırlamadığımdan zaruret-i fevkalgaye tesiratıyla filibe'de nezd-i peder ve madere ilticaya mecbur oldum (...)]" BOA, Y.PRK.MK., 7/78/1, H-06-02-1315.

living through journalism. He also mentioned that he could take on duties such as serving as a district governor (şehbender) or working at an embassy or consulate, as emphasized in the 11th and 12th articles of his certificate (şehadetname). He expressed his desire to find employment as quickly as possible.⁴¹

Ali Fehmi's appeal to the Ottoman representatives in Bulgaria was actually normal, as even Mizancı Murad Bey, a member of the Young Turks, had agreed to stop his activities against the Sultan in exchange for being pardoned and rewarded in the capital with employment.⁴²

It seems that the reason Ali Fehmi was not assigned to any position in the state bureaucracy or any school, including those in rural areas, was because of his sympathies towards the Young Turks. Most likely due to suspicions about his activities, he was unjustly accused and forced to resign from his last position in Ankara following a fire incident, similar to what happened at Kırkkilise School. An archival document recorded in January 1905 supports this view.⁴³ In this document, Ali Fehmi's activities, ideas, and life story are mentioned, and he is accused of being negligent in religious matters, just like his time at Kırkkilise School.

Rıza Paşa, the editor of the *Gayret* newspaper, who showed sympathy towards the Sultan, was sent to convince Ali Fehmi to join his publication under the guidance of Ottoman officials.⁴⁴ However, despite his application in July 1897, Ali Fehmi could not obtain any results and was not appointed to any position. As a result, he started to approach Ottoman promises with skepticism.⁴⁵ Therefore, rejecting officials' promises and offers, he finally launched *Muvazene* on September 2, 1897. Despite varying degrees of intensity over time, the newspaper maintained its critical stance throughout its publication and remained ideologically consistent. Although some sources indicate that the first issue was dated August 20,

41 BOA, Y.PRK.MK., 7/78/1. H-06-02-1315.

42 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 108.

43 BOA, HR.SFR.04. 453/25/4, M-14-01-1905.

44 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 108.

45 *Ibid*, 108.

1896, the accurate date is September 2, 1897. The first issue was printed at Tırgovska Peçatniska printing house in Filibe.⁴⁶

On September 12, 1897, a document was sent from Bulgarian Commissioner's Office (Bulgaristan Komiserliği) to Imperial Court of the Sultan (Mabeyn-i Hümayun-u Cenab-ı Mülukane Başkitabet-i Celilesi) regarding the newspaper.⁴⁷ In this document, the Bulgarian Commissioner Nasuhi Bey, stated that he had informed Stoylof on September 4, 1897, that Ali Fehmi did not fulfill the promises he made when obtaining permission for *Muvazene* newspaper. Nasuhi Bey mentioned that he would call Ali Fehmi to the Commissioner's Office once again to try to convince him to shut down *Muvazene*. If Ali Fehmi agreed to close the newspaper and ask for forgiveness, Nasuhi Bey promised him amnesty.⁴⁸

3.2.1 *Imperial Strategies Against Muvazene in a Foreign Country*

Initially, Filibeli Ali Fehmi had no intention of shutting down *Muvazene* newspaper, and his family supported his endeavor. His brother, Mehmed Sabri, provided both editorial and likely writing support, while his brother-in-law, Tırnovalı Osman Nuri, published articles on pedagogy and education in *Muvazene*.⁴⁹ The period in which *Muvazene* started its publication was a fragile time for Muslim publishing in Bulgaria, and the success of the newspaper was uncertain at first.⁵⁰ One of the reasons for this fragility was that the Istanbul government silenced, closed, or changed the names of opposition publications by promising rewards and incentives. For example, *Hamiyet*, *Emniyet*, and *Bedreka-i Selamet* newspapers were closed in this way.⁵¹ According to *Muvazene*'s account, the owner of *Emniyet* and *Bedreka-i Selamet* newspapers, Hilmi Efendi from Selanik sold his moveable types and left Filibe, while *Hamiyet* newspaper

46 Karagöz, *Bulgaristan Türk Basını*, 119.

47 BOA, Y.MTV., 166/204, H-14-04-1315.

48 Ibid.

49 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 109.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid, 109.

reported this news to its readers and added that it had learned a lesson from the situation. Ali Fehmi shared with *Muvazene* readers that Hilmi Efendi had gone to Istanbul to obtain a government position.⁵² However, the Bulgarian administration turned a blind eye to *Muvazene*'s activities. Ottoman officials could not intervene with *Muvazene* newspaper, which operated under Bulgarian jurisdiction for a period of eight years until 1905. As Methodieva claims, it is possible that *Muvazene* newspaper served as a bargaining tool between Bulgaria's rulers and the Ottoman Empire.⁵³

It is notable that the most significant attempts to shut down *Muvazene* came from Necib Melhame, the Ottoman Commissioner in Sofia at the time. Although Theodore Ivanchof, who was then the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, made promises to Necib Melhame regarding this matter, the newspaper was never closed.⁵⁴ Necib Melhame served as the Ottoman Commissioner to Bulgaria between 1898 and 1902. He was one of the most trusted Paşas during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, having gained the Sultan's trust during his service in the intelligence organization in Egypt.⁵⁵ He also earned the Sultan's appreciation during his mission in Paris, where he persuaded many students to return to Istanbul as loyal citizens.⁵⁶ After returning to Istanbul, Necib Melhame was appointed as an associate in the Council of State (Şura-yı Devlet) through a

52 *Muvazene*, 7. Sayı, Teşrinievvel 1313 (13 Ekim 1897).

53 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 109; BOA, HR.SFR.04., 453/25/4, M-14-01-1905. "Unless a suitable opportunity arises to completely halt the publication of *Muvazene* newspaper, it seems unlikely that any significant outcome can be achieved in this matter. Therefore, I cannot think of any other solution than leaving the newspaper in its current state of controversy and widespread public disapproval, without giving it any further importance or attention it deserves along with similar publications. [*Muvazene* gazetesinin neşrini kamilen men eyleyecek bir fırsat zuhur etmedikçe bu babdaki teşebbüsattan bir netice çıkamayacağı cihetle gazeteyi şimdiki bulunduğu çerkab-ı denaeti ve âlemin nefret-i muhakkakası tahtında bırakmaktan ve buna ve emsaline layık oldukları tarzda katiyyen atf-ı ehemmiyet eylemekden gayrı bir çare düşünememekteyim.]"

54 BOA, HR.SFR.04., 453/25/4, M-14-01-1905.

55 Taşkın, "Necib Melhame Paşa'nın Siyasî Hayatı," 11.

56 Ibid, 21.

decree dated August 18, 1898, and shortly thereafter, on September 3, 1898, he was appointed as the Ottoman Commissioner in Sofia.⁵⁷

When Necib Melhame took office, it was challenging to talk about the influence of the Ottoman authority in Bulgaria.⁵⁸ It was evident that the efforts of the Ottoman government to close down *Muvazene* newspaper were insufficient, and the intervention of the Bulgarian government was necessary. Therefore, the Ottoman government was trying different strategies to enhance its authority in the region. One such strategy was silencing opposition publications by offering rewards and positions. It seems that there was also a gossip-like dimension to whether Ali Fehmi would be tempted by these offers. Ali Fehmi's activist and outspoken style already drew attention, and his attention from the government added fuel to the fire. For instance, in the 46th issue of *Muvazene*, the *Otuzif* newspaper openly speculated that "after Mizancı Murad Bey and Rıza Paşa, it was now Ali Fehmi's turn, and he was receiving financial support from the capital." This raised suspicions that Ali Fehmi had abandoned his ideas to reach an agreement with the Ottoman government. In response, Ali Fehmi published the articles written about him in *Muvazene* and stated in his reply that he would continue to serve the people gradually with his own efforts, thus ensuring the longevity of *Muvazene*.⁵⁹

The Ottoman government's policy of silencing opposition was not limited to co-opting critical newspapers by offering rewards, ranks, and offices. One of the fundamental issues criticized by *Muvazene* was the widespread intelligence organization in Bulgaria, which regularly provided information to the Sultan, keeping him informed of any opposition movements. In the first year of *Muvazene*'s publication, numerous criticisms of the intelligence organization were published, indicating that the spies carefully observed Ali Fehmi and *Muvazene* newspaper. The year

57 Ibid, 25.

58 Ibid, 31.

59 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 46. Sayı, 8 Temmuz 1314 (20 Temmuz 1898), 2. "Muvazene is inclined to live a long life in order to gradually serve on its own merit. [Muvazene kendi emeği mukabiliyle yavaş yavaş hizmet edebilmek için çok yaşamak yaşamak fikrindedir.]"

1898 witnessed an increasing presence of spies in Filibe. Some spies engaged in this work to earn ranks or money, while others continued with the hope of receiving some reward one day. Ali Fehmi viewed this activity as “dishonesty” and considered the government’s payments to the spies as “waste” and “squandering” in comparison to the sufferings experienced by Muslims. According to Ali Fehmi, the spies’ hostile behavior towards opponents of the Sultan did not go unnoticed by even the supporters of the Sultan, and these negative attitudes inclined impartial individuals to become opponents of the Sultan, which ultimately benefited the spies.⁶⁰ Additionally, Ali Fehmi argued in the 44th issue of *Muvazene* that spies deceived the state by portraying non-opponents of the Sultan as if they were the enemies of the regime, creating the impression that there was still work for spies to do in Filibe.⁶¹

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- 60 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 36. Sayı, 29 Nisan 1314 (11 Mayıs 1898), 2. *“The profession of espionage is thriving in Filibe. So far, the spies have not faced any obstacles in carrying out their activities, as the government has not taken any measures against them. However, while some spies receive salaries, ranks, and honors, others are left with nothing but the hope of engaging in immoral acts. The administration of the country is wasting money in vain, while the people suffer. As the hatred towards this profession grows, it leads to various scandals in the name of the Sultan, drawing the attention of the loyal subjects. In fact, some individuals, despite not being against the Sultan, are forced into acting contrary to their will due to pressure and surveillance, thus benefiting the spies. [Filibe’de hafiyelek meslek-i meşumu gittikçe terakki ediyor. Şimdiye kadar hükümet tarafından mümanaat görmediği için hafiyeler istediği gibi oynamakta düçar-ı müşkilat olmuyor. Mamefih bazıları maaş rütbe nişan aldığı halde diğerleri bu ümit ile namussuzluğu itikap etmekten başka kar görmüyor. Türkiye idaresi bad-ı hava para zayi ediyor. Millet eziliyor. Bu meslekin mucibi nefret oldukça padişah namına birtakım rezaletler ihtiyar olunuyor hafiyelerin hareketi sadıkların da nazarı dikkatini celb ediyor. Hatta bazıları padişahın aleyhinde olmadıkları halde tazyik ve takib neticesinde aksi surette mecbur edilerek hafiyelerin ekmeğine yağ sürülüyor.]”*
- 61 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 44. Sayı, 24 Haziran 1314 (6 Temmuz 1898), 2. *“(…) claiming to be protected and sponsored by the Sultan, they try to deceive people with their false pretenses, while proclaiming that they are not against the noble person (Sultan). Their intention is to turn people away from their declared professions and deceive the state and the nation by creating a trap, as if there were important matters to attend to in Filibe, in order to embezzle the funds of the state and the people. However, it is clear from their*

One day, a person named İskender, who was a representative from Istanbul Court, sent a letter to Ali Fehmi expressing his desire to have a 30-minute interview with him. İskender mentioned that depending on the situation, he could either visit Ali Fehmi or host him at the Bulgarian hotel where he was staying. Although Ali Fehmi did not know who İskender was, he decided to go to the Bulgarian hotel for the interview. There, he noticed that the person who sent the card was busy writing and receiving telegrams one after another. Despite İskender's attempts to assure Ali Fehmi that he received numerous telegrams from his family and that he was not a spy for the government, Ali Fehmi's suspicions were printed in *Muvazene*, and he concluded that İskender was trying to collect information just like the other spies of Sultan in Bulgaria, who were resulting in discontent among Bulgarian Muslims.⁶²

The spies in Filibe had made a considerable amount of money by paying local and foreign suppliers to confiscate the printed materials. According to Ali Fehmi's claim, an amount of 1050 lira was paid for this purpose, which could have been used to buy clothes for 1000 soldiers.⁶³ In a reproachful manner towards the officials who attempted to deceive the printers with a promise of 500 francs, Ali Fehmi did not hesitate to ask, "Have we written anything against the Sultan? Are we writing such things? Then what do the spies want from us?" He also added that in a region where the rule of law is implemented, such inappropriate actions would bring more harm than benefit.⁶⁴

actions that they are of no significance or importance. [(...) hafiye ve yataklarının padişah tarafından himaye ve iltizam olunduğunu iddia ederek bir taraftan göz boyacılığı diğer cihetten muaccizlikleriyle 'zat-ı şahane aleyhinde değiliz' diyenleri de ilan ettikleri mesleklerinden döndürmek ve bu suretle güya filibe de iş var imiş gibi devlet ve milletin paralarını dolandırmak için bir tuzak tertibine çalışmak denaetinden haber ibaret ise de hareketlerinin hiçbir ehemmiyeti olmadığı beyandan müstağnidir.]"

62 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," 36. Sayı, *Muvazene*, 29 Nisan 1314 (11 Mayıs 1898), 2.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid, 3. *Have we written anything against the Sultan? Are we criticizing him? If not, then what do the spies want from us? (...) Those who deceive the Sultan and plunder the nation, causing oppression and abuse in his name, even the helpless Muslim villagers in Macedonia*

In one example, the Ottoman government reached an agreement with M. Agop Dzeronian, an Armenian manufacturer of moveable type from whom Ali Fehmi purchased his own set, around the end of September 1897. As a result, Ali Fehmi's access to moveable type was hindered. This strategy was a new step taken by the government since Ali Fehmi did not compromise with any government officials. In the "open letters" section of *Muvazene's* 8th issue dated October 14, 1897, Ali Fehmi directly addressed Dzeronian:

You wrote that you could not provide moveable types for us for less than 2.50 francs because you witnessed our kindness. Despite agreeing to this price, in another letter, you mentioned that you would not be able to deliver them for who knows how many months due to various conditions. Your letters are preserved. They say that you have secured the profit you would gain from those who order Turkish articles through a foolish man who claims that he grew from begging on the docks, and who does not have any idea about our old letters. And we are not surprised about not fulfilling the orders we gave you for Enterlin Bey, either. We procured them from Vienna. It is recommended that you make an exception for the Turkish articles you wrote in *Otuzif* newspaper. Monsieur!⁶⁵

and Bulgaria suffer in silence, crying out in inner anguish. [Biz padişah aleyhinde bir şey yazdık mı? yazıyor muyuz? Öyle ise hafiyeler bizden ne istiyor. (...) Padişahı aldatmakla milleti soymakla temin-i taayyüş edenlerden padişah namına edilen zulüm ve tecavüzlerden Makedonya Bulgarları değil seslerini işittiremeyen biçare köy Müslümanları bile feryad-ı deruni ile tazallüm-ü hal ediyor.]"

- 65 "Açık Mektuplar," *Muvazene*, 7. Sayı, 1 Teşrinievvel 1313 (13 Ekim 1897), 4. "Çok iyiliğini gördüğünüz için hurufatı bizim için 2,50 franktan aşağı yapamayacağınızı yazmış idiniz. Bu fiyata razı olduğunuz hâlde diğer bir mektubunuzla bilmem kaç aydan evvel yapamayacağınızı, daha bilmem ne kadar şartlarla işar etmiş idiniz. Mektuplarınız mahfuzdur. Bizim eski harflerimizden gafil, rıhtımlar üzerinde dilencilikten başlayarak büyüdüğünü söyleyen bir cahil herifin dostu ile Türkçe yazı sipariş edenlerden kazanacağınız kârı size temin etmişler diyorlar. Şimdi de Enterlin Bey için 5 yerden verdiğimiz siparişleri yap-

In another instance, a person named Acem Ali Bey, whose guidance came from Istanbul authorities, although unknown to Ali Fehmi, tried several times to damage the molds and moveable types of *Muvazene* in an attempt to gain control over its compositor, Mehmed. However, since Acem Ali Bey could not offer Mehmed an enticing proposition, this attempt remained fruitless.⁶⁶ Similarly, a person named Artın Efendi, who wandered around Filibe disguised as a journalist, managed to collect all the available moveable types in the city and deceived the compositors. The news that the compositor of *Muvazene* had been deceived was deliberately spread, creating the perception that the newspaper would no longer be published.⁶⁷ Ali Fehmi had to deal with the recurring issue of the compositors and, as a precaution, started training an Armenian child to become a compositor. In the 11th issue of *Muvazene*, Ali Fehmi proudly shared with the readers the accomplishment of publishing the newspaper on time, even in the face of numerous challenges, by handwriting the copies.

In the 36th issue, he interpreted the obstruction of the export of type-face machines by the Sublime Porte as “greasing the palms of the experts in moveable types and the industry in Vienna and Bulgaria.”⁶⁸ It seems that before the 44th issue was published, the spies made another attempt to deceive the typesetter and printers, but Ali Fehmi emerged victorious from this endeavor as well.⁶⁹

madığınıza taaccüp etmedik. Viyana'dan tedarik ettik. Otuzif gazetesine yazdığınız Türkçe Frenkçe bilmem nece ilanından Türkçe yazı döktüğünüzü istisna etmeniz tavsiye olunur. Mösyö!”

66 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 36. Sayı, 29 Nisan 1314 (11 Mayıs 1898), 2.

67 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 12. Sayı, 12 Teşrinisani 1313 (24 Kasım 1897), 2.

68 Ibid.

69 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 44. Sayı, 24 Haziran 1314 (6 Temmuz 1898), 2.

“The spies and their accomplices in Filibe have taken their indecency to the extreme. They have made every effort to deceive the publisher and disrupt ‘Muvazene’ by manipulating the printers. However, their futile attempts were completely understood last Tuesday, and they realized that they cannot achieve anything. [Filibe’de bulunan hafiye ve yatakları

3.2.2 *Ali Fehmi's Demands for Amnesty*

Despite his public posture criticizing the attempts by the center to co-opt his critical publications, Ali Fehmi, due to financial problems and health issues, ended up submitting two letters of regret to the Ottoman government, and these letters were somewhat positively received. Being unable to travel to the empire without the threat of arrest under the surveillance of the Ottoman authorities and the supervision of Bulgarian officials, he had to seek amnesty from the Ottoman officials.⁷⁰ In his first petition dated October 22, 1900, addressed to the Ottoman Commissionerate to Bulgaria, Ali Fehmi expressed regret for what he had published in previous issues of *Muvazene* and stated that his main objective was to contribute to the progress and education of the Muslim population in Rumelia. He added that even though he published his personal opinions, his intention was never to oppose the Sultan, and emphasized that he was not one of the fugitives who fled to Europe.

In fact, Ali Fehmi's request for amnesty, which aimed for the permission to sell *Muvazene* newspaper throughout the Ottoman Empire, became an opportunity for Ottoman officials. After all, imperial authorities had long sought to prevent the publication of *Muvazene*, and the regret expressed by the newspaper's owner was a means to easily put an end to such activities. By eliminating all the previous attributes of *Muvazene*, changing its name, and removing "Fehmi" from Ali Fehmi's signature, the authorities reasoned, the last obstacle to this "cleansing" would be the disappearance of *Muvazene*, which would be a great success for Ottoman authorities in Bulgaria.⁷¹

His second plea for imperial pardon was dated June 17, 1901, a petition delivered to the Ottoman Commissionerate by Mehmed Sabri, Ali Fehmi's brother. Mehmed Sabri stated that he wrote the petition not only

edepsizliklerini son dereceye çıkarmışlardır. Mürettibi, matbacıları kandırmakla 'muvazene'yi sekteye haber uğratmak gayretkeşliğinde cemil merbuları bir halt edemeyeceklerini dünki salı günü katiyen anlamışlardır.]"

70 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 109.

71 BOA, Y.PRK.MYD., 23/45, H-27-06-1318.

on behalf of Ali Fehmi but with the approval and encouragement of their entire family, and he attributed the mistaken path followed by *Muvazene*, which had been published for four years, to Ali Fehmi's illness. Mehmed Sabri mentioned that Ali Fehmi would rest, and since he himself had no income, he was in need of 40-50 liras. Therefore, he requested permission to publish a new newspaper with a different name and signature. Mehmed Sabri, who requested permission for a newspaper named *Kıymet* on behalf of his family, also emphasized that if they were to engage in any daring actions after obtaining permission, they would accept any punishment in advance. The petition also highlighted that among the Turkish-language newspapers that engaged in harmful publications *Muvazene* was the only one remaining in the region.⁷²

Following Mehmed Sabri's petition, a letter dated June 17, 1901, was sent from the office of the Ottoman Commissionerate regarding Ali Fehmi's plea. The commissioner Necib Melhame reported that an agreement had been reached between the owner of *Muvazene* newspaper, Ali Fehmi, who had engaged in "harmful" publications, and the Ottoman officials. Necib Melhame emphasized that the *Muvazene* newspaper which had been engaged in opposition publications in Eastern Rumelia and Bulgaria for a while had now been shut down, and thus, there was no Turkish-language harmful publication left in the region. Following these statements, Necib Melhame requested permission for the publication of a newspaper called *Kıymet*, which would replace *Muvazene* and be published on behalf of Ali Fehmi. Additionally, drawing on the example of the *Gayret* newspaper, which received funding for its pro-regime publications, Necib Melhame requested a monthly payment of 1500 kuruş to be provided to the *Kıymet* newspaper to encourage it to publish in the same direction. According to this agreement, Filibeli Ali Fehmi would improve his style in his publications, permission would be granted for the circulation of the newspaper in Istanbul, the new name of the newspaper would

72 BOA, Y.MTV., 217/9, H-01-03-1319.

be *Kıymet*, and Ali Fehmi's name would be removed from the signature section.⁷³

Although Ali Fehmi wrote two letters of regret to the government, most likely due to financial difficulties, he did not shut down his newspaper despite the economic opportunities offered by the government. Ali Fehmi, who did not give up his ideological stance in publishing, was considered by the Ottoman officials to be “unappreciative.”⁷⁴ The Ottoman officials believed that the reason Ali Fehmi did not take advantage of the opportunities offered by the government was his pride. They believed that Ali Fehmi’s pride was influenced by the fact that *Muvazene* began to be read even among Muslims in Russia at one point, and they did not believe his excuse of illness.⁷⁵

73 BOA, Y.MTV., 217/9, H-01-03-1319. “Ali Fehmi Bey expressed his regret and apologized to him in a Second Commissionerate, promising to correct his language. As a favor, permission was granted for the newspaper to enter Istanbul. [Ali Fehmi Bey’e ikinci kitabete müracaatla izhar-ı nedamet etmiş ve tadil-i lisan edeceğini bilbeyan gazetesinin dersaadete duhulüne müsaade olunması iltimas edilmiştir.]”

74 BOA, HR.SFR.04., 453/25, 5, M-14-01-1905. “Due to the *Muvazene* newspaper’s failure to achieve the desired impact and its dissemination of delusions, which resulted in a low reputation among the Muslim community, it has twice expressed regret and sought refuge and forgiveness from its predecessors and readers, first in the years 313 and later in 316 and 317. Although it managed to secure some degree of forgiveness and the grace of His Majesty the Sultan, either by making certain proposals that lacked sincerity or by attempting to benefit personally from a larger platform, it ultimately failed to benefit from the audience’s presence and remained in a state of insignificance and obscurity.[*Muvazene* gazetesini ümid ettiği tesirati hasıl edememesi ve neşrettiği hezeyanları müntesibin-i İslam nazarında bilakis zelil ve hakir olması hasebiyle birinci defası 313 ve diğeri 316 ve 317 senelerinde olmak üzere iki defa izhar-ı nedamet ile selef-i çakeraneme ve kemterlerine müracaat ve iltica eylemiş ve mazhar-ı afv ve ıtlak-ı hazret-i padişah-ı azami olması bir dereceye kadar temin dahi edilmişken ya birtakım teklif-i malayutakta bulunarak veyahut istifade-i şahsiyesini büyük makasida temine çalışarak arz-ı didarandan ve sair den istifadeye şitaban olmaması ve denaetinde kemakân-puyan olmaya mahkum kalmıştır.]”

75 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 110.

3.2.3 The “Young Turkism” of Ali Fehmi

In the mid-1890s, in addition to the main centers of the Young Turk movement such as Paris, Geneva, and Cairo, there were also active Young Turk activities in the Balkans, with the most prominent ones located in Bulgaria. The reasons for the easy spread of the Young Turk movement in the Balkans included practical factors such as the lack of control of Ottoman officials over the Young Turks as well as the appeal of the Young Turk publications in addressing the problems faced by the Muslim population in the region.⁷⁶ The popularity of the movement in Bulgaria was based on the rhetoric of educating and advancing the Muslim population.⁷⁷ Concerns about society were blended with Young Turk ideology, thus creating an association between Muslim readers and Young Turk publications. Indeed, Young Turk publications fearlessly published social, current, and vibrant discussions, keeping the masses informed not only about regional developments, but also global events. This was a characteristic of the Young Turk activities, and in this context, Ali Fehmi, like Tahir Lütü and Mehmed Masum, contributed to the adaptation of the Young Turk ideology to the regional context.⁷⁸

In this context, Ali Fehmi’s claim of neutrality is not surprising. He narrated the experiences of the local population and opened discussions on various issues. The problems faced by the Muslim population in Bulgaria were projected onto the persecution experienced by Muslims in other parts of the world, which increased Ali Fehmi’s enthusiasm for the struggle. Initially, *Muvazene* newspaper expressed carefully its criticisms of the Bulgarian efforts at nation-building, a critical stance that did not seem to bother Bulgarian authorities. Over the course of time, however, tensions escalated because Ali Fehmi increased his criticisms of the treat-

76 *Ibid*, 126.

77 *Ibid*.

78 *Ibid*.

ment of Muslims in the region and the ambitions of Bulgarians in Ottoman Macedonia.⁷⁹ The opinions of the Muslim population in Filibe regarding *Muvazene* were diverse, with both supporters and opponents. Antipathy towards *Muvazene* increased, especially due to its destructive criticism of the regime in later issues.⁸⁰ Ali Fehmi was an important Young Turk figure in Bulgaria, and as Methodieva also suggests, there is little doubt about the content of his newspaper and his sympathies. However, Ali Fehmi denied this and did not define *Muvazene* newspaper as a Young Turk publication, always emphasizing its neutrality.⁸¹

In January 1901, Ali Fehmi attempted to run as a candidate in the Bulgarian parliamentary elections and published a brochure titled “Bulgarian Muslims,” which illustrated his continued interest in the local conditions of Muslims in the country. Although he was not elected to the parliament, the brochure he published was not only a political propaganda but also a comprehensive reform for the Muslim community.⁸² Eventually, Ali Fehmi returned to journalism. In 1901, he moved *Muvazene* to Varna, where *Muvazene* continued to be published until 1903.⁸³ Since there is no evidence about the reason of his move from Filibe, it can be argued that he probably moved *Muvazene* to Varna due to economic reasons.

In the early days of publishing his newspaper, it is clear that Ali Fehmi pragmatically emphasized neutrality in the contentious political atmosphere of the time. Nevertheless, he was indeed a Young Turk. First and foremost, during the period when *Muvazene* was published in Varna, in 1902, he was invited to Paris to participate in the Young Turk Congress as the representative of Muslims. He maintained his neutrality amidst factional divisions within the society.⁸⁴ At that time, the power struggles

79 *Ibid*, 109.

80 *Ibid*.

81 *Ibid*.

82 *Ibid*, 110.

83 Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 74.

84 BOA, Y..MTV., 225/95, H-17-10-1319.

between different groups in Paris, Geneva, and Cairo did not extend to the Balkans, so Ali Fehmi's neutral stance was seen as a pragmatic approach to gaining support from all groups.⁸⁵ During his journey to the 1902 congress, he also traveled to Switzerland, Austria-Hungary, and Romania, and shared his experiences in *Muvazene* issues.⁸⁶ Additionally, he mentioned the discussions and decisions made at the Paris meeting in his newspaper, as seen in the document sent from Varna to the Sofia Commission.⁸⁷

3.2.4 Dealing With Muvazene

After returning to Filibe from Varna in January 1903, Filibeli Ali Fehmi was appointed as a court clerk in Filibe. However, according to the records, his family did not provide much support for his activities, and his brother Mehmed Sabri even refused to sit at the same table. It is alleged that Ali Fehmi managed to improve his situation by receiving money from Damad Mahmud Paşa in Varna, which helped him save his seized printing press and made him to decide to publish his newspaper in Filibe.⁸⁸

85 Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 73.

86 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 109.

87 BOA, HR.SFR.04., 220/72/7, M-14-01-1905. "According to the information and regulations that were circulating in the mentioned society, Ali Fehmi Efendi's newspaper, which was published yesterday, addressed various facts, knowledge, and decisions (...) [Mumaileyh Ali Fehmi Efendi'nin dünki gün neşretmiş olduğu gazetesini cemiyet-i mezkurede cereyan etmiş olan malumat ve hükalemat ve mukarrerattan bahis bulunmuş olduğuna mebni (...)]"

88 BOA, HR.SFR.04.. 220/72/3, M-28-01-1903 "Having arranged his appearance and clothing in Varna, it is evident that he sustained himself with the money he obtained from Damad Mahmud Paşa and managed to save his press materials when he arrived in Filibe. As a result, he decided to publish his newspaper in Filibe and began its publication in the current year. [Varna'da kılık ve kıyafeti düzmüş ve reviş-i halden anlaşıldığına göre Damad Mahmud Paşa'dan çektiği paralarıyla karnını doyurmuş olduğundan Filibe'ye vürudıyla beraber taht-ı hacizde bulunan hurufatını kurtararak sene-yi hazıra zarfında gazetesini Filibe'de neşre karar vermiş ve neşretmeye başlamıştır.]"

Ottoman representatives filed a lawsuit against Ali Fehmi in Varna, accusing him of using anti-sultan language in his newspaper in an attempt to shut it down.⁸⁹ A war between the Ottoman Empire and *Muvazene* began due to the bold publications of *Muvazene*, which were deemed “indecent and malicious” by the Ottoman authorities in Filibe. There was concern that if the newspaper continued to be published, the inappropriate and unworthy demands of *Muvazene* sympathizers would increase. With tensions already high in Filibe, it was essential to close *Muvazene* to prevent the emergence of new conflicts.⁹⁰ When Ali Fehmi published the 263rd issue of his newspaper on January 21, 1903, he was in Filibe, where he had moved the newspaper due to his appointment as a court clerk. From this point on, Ali Fehmi began to attract the backlash of Bulgarians and nationalists in Ottoman Macedonia.⁹¹

The coverage of *Muvazene* of world politics also had the potential to put the local government in a difficult situation. Ali Fehmi’s aggressive language towards the Russians regarding the Russo-Japanese War, his criticism of the Bulgarian government, and his writings about Bulgarian revolutionaries could have disturbed the Bulgarian government, which could have had negative consequences for Muslims in Rumelia. The closure of the newspaper seemed imminent, not because of its criticisms of the Sultan’s rule, but due to the newspaper’s growing potential to meddle into the politics of the Muslim minorities in Bulgaria. However, despite the demands of the Bulgarian press in Filibe, the Bulgarian government did not take any measures, and since there was “freedom of the press” in the region, attempts to completely close *Muvazene* remained unsuccessful until 1905.⁹² In this context, the Russian consul was informed about

89 Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 74.

90 BOA, HR.SFR.04., 453/25/4, M-14-01-1905.

91 Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 74.

92 BOA, HR.SFR.04., 453/25/4, M-14-01-1905. “Considering the demand and publication of the Bulgarian press in Filibe, it is apparent that no measures have been taken by the Bulgarian government regarding *Muvazene*. In light of this observation, it is strongly evident that the Bulgarian government, by engaging in such an endeavor, would attempt to exploit certain interests and sell an inexpensive service at an exorbitant price. [Filibe’deki Bulgar

Muvazene's anti-Russian sentiments and its instigation of the "Islamic world against the Russians."⁹³

Filibeli Ali Fehmi raised a question in his newspaper that would likely intrigue everyone's mind, "What would happen if a war broke out between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire?" At a time when Bulgarian revolutionaries were rampant, and the atmosphere was filled with rumors of rebellion and revenge, such a war was possible, and the Bulgarians had become bolder thanks to their trust in Russia. Indeed, during the period when Russia was at war with Japan, Bulgarians had great confidence in Russia. Therefore, Ali Fehmi questioned what Muslims would do in such a scenario, what steps they would take to protect their properties and honor, which major powers could help them, and whom they could seek assistance from in case of looting and attacks. According to Ali Fehmi, migration would be the most reasonable choice in such a scenario.⁹⁴

First, *Muvazene* was banned from entering Russia. In March 1905, In March 1905, the *Muvazene* printing press was set on fire by the

matbuatının talep ve neşriyatına rağmen Bulgar hükümet-i hazırasınca Muvazene hakkında hiçbir gûne tedbir alınmamış olduğunu nazar-ı dikkate alındığı takdirde böyle bir teşebbüsle Bulgar hükümetinin birtakım menafi-i temine kıyam ile burada ucuz bir hizmeti pahalıya satmaya çalışacağı kaviyyen melfuzdur.]"

93 BOA, HR.SFR.04., 453/25/4, M-14-01-1905. "It is necessary for the aforementioned newspaper to be aware that its content may not have a positive impact. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to meet with the Russian consul in Filibe and convince him to have these facts written by Monsieur Bahmetika, the Sofia correspondent. If necessary, when we meet with Monsieur Bahmetif regarding this matter, it will be stated that you are authorized to convey the message to the consul. The necessary arrangements have been made for the preparation of the written materials. [Mezkur gazete münderecatının her halde hüsn-i tesiri olmayacağını bilmesi lazım gelen Filibe Rus konsolosu ile görüşerek işbu hakayıkı Sofya Generali Mösyö Bahmetika yazılmağa ikna edilmesini ve icab eder ise Mösyö Bahmetif ile bu babda görüşmüş olduğumuzda mumaileyh konsolosa söylemeye mezun olduğunuzu beyan zımında tahrirat terkim kılındı.]

94 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 214.

Vu'rkhovist Committee as a sign of these troubled relations.⁹⁵ After this incident, Ali Fehmi was deported from Bulgaria in same year and went to Paris. During this period, he faced the dangers of arrest and deportation in Europe. Eventually, he chose to settle in Geneva. Mehmed Sabri's opinion about the article that caused indignation was that this article had disturbed Bulgarians more than Muslims.⁹⁶ Instead of debating the accuracy of Mehmed Sabri's proposition, it would be more accurate to say that *Muvazene* was not closed due to a single question; rather, that question served as the spark that ignited the fuse. According to Ali Fehmi's own words in which he addresses his past troubles, Ali Fehmi stated that the Bulgarian government decided to hand over Ali Fehmi to Abdülhamid in exchange for a desired trade agreement with the Ottoman government.⁹⁷

3.2.5 *Ali Fehmi in Geneva*

Ali Fehmi chose to settle in Geneva and published a few more issues of *Muvazene* there. Adem Ruhi Karagöz indicates that the first issue was published on June 21, 1905.⁹⁸ While in Geneva, he decided to join the Young Turks in November 1906. Ottoman officials believed that during this time, Ali Fehmi sought assistance from the Young Turks in Geneva, which they referred to as "agents of corruption," noting that the committee members supported him because they shared the same ideology.

95 Vürkhoven (Върховен) means supreme in Bulgarian, which means these were members or supporters of Supreme Macedonian Committee. "By the end of 1895 the Macedonian movement in Bulgaria had strengthened considerably and in its second congress the central committee renamed itself the Supreme Macedonian Committee; this was a reaction to the foundation in 1893 of what was later to become the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) which aimed for Macedonian autonomy rather than union with Bulgaria and which was soon to be in bitter rivalry with the Bulgarian 'supremacists.'" Robert J. Crampton, *A Concise History Bulgaria*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 151.

96 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 111.

97 "Arz-ı Meram," *Muvazene*, 376. Sayı, 5 Teşrinievvel 1327 (18 Ekim 1911), 1.

98 Karagöz, *Bulgaristan Türk Basını*, 120.

Although *Muvazene* did not receive much attention in Geneva, it continued to be published due to the financial support of committee members until 1907.⁹⁹ Bulgarians framed Ali Fehmi as “an Asian who was the enemy of civilization” (*medeniyet düşmanı Asyalı Ali Fehmi*), hoping that he would abandon his activities in exchange for bribes from Istanbul. However, instead of returning to Istanbul, he had already decided to go to Afghanistan.¹⁰⁰

3.2.6 The Successor of Muvazene: Ahali

After Ali Fehmi moved to Geneva, his brother Mehmed Sabri became the publisher of the newspaper in Filibe. Mehmed Sabri, with the intention of continuing *Muvazene*, published two newspapers under the name *Ahali* on April 6 and 7, 1905.¹⁰¹ Yunus Reşid and Talha Kemali assisted Mehmed Sabri, and Ali Fehmi also sent letters to Mehmed Sabri from Geneva. However, the Bulgarian government refused to accept the publication of *Muvazene*, even under a different title.¹⁰² Ottoman authorities raised concerns about the possibility and danger of Mehmed Sabri being assaulted one day and the newspaper building being raided.¹⁰³ Indeed,

99 BOA, HR.SFR.04., 453/25/4, M-14-01-1905. “Due to the strong publications against the Russians, entry into Russia has been prohibited (...) the newspaper itself has made the decision to travel from Filibe to Geneva in order to salvage a share for itself from the troublemakers in that area. The fact that the newspaper is not being read or popularized in these regions reinforces the belief that it is being supported by the troublemakers in Europe. [...] Ruslar hakkındaki neşriyat-ı şedidesi üzerine Rusya’ya duhulü men edilmesi üzerine (...) bizzat Filibe’den Cenevre’ye azimetle oradaki erbab-ı fesadın hisse-i temeddundan Muvazene’ye bir pay kurtarabilmek hevesine düşmüştür. Gazetenin buralarda okunmaması ve revaç bulmaması ile beraber neşrinin devamı buna Avrupa’daki müfsitler tarafından muavenet olduğu fikrini takviye etmektedir.]

100 “Arz-ı Meram,” *Muvazene*, 376. Sayı, 5 Teşrinievvel 1327 (18 Ekim 1911), 1.

101 Karagöz, *Bulgaristan Türk Basını*, 29.

102 Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 74.

103 BOA, HR.SFR.04., 453/25/4, M-14-01-1905. “Ali Fehmi, primarily out of fear of residing in Filibe, had moved to Geneva, where he continued to write and publish articles that intensified the animosity and grudges of the Bulgarians. It was a known fact that his brother

Yunus Reşid was seriously assaulted by Vu'rkhovists, and Talha Kemali left the city and began working as an elementary school teacher in Pazarlık.¹⁰⁴ Mehmed Sabri received a sentence for “inciting the subjects against the Principality of Bulgaria” and “inviting Ottoman intervention against the Principality of Bulgaria.”¹⁰⁵ The Bulgarian government initially sentenced him to death but later commuted the sentence to 3.5 years in prison and a fine of 2,000 leva.¹⁰⁶

After seven months and twenty-four days, Mehmed Sabri was released from prison, Reşit Efendi recovered, and Talha Kemali Efendi resigned from his position and returned to Filibe. Thus, they managed to resume the publication of *Ahali* in late 1906. The newspaper, which started its publication again in November 1906, continued until August 1, 1908. Like *Muvazene*, it was printed at the Tırgovska Peçatnitsa printing press in Filibe.¹⁰⁷ *Ahali* promised to publish letters from the local populations, which aligned with *Muvazene*'s editorial line, discuss issues relevant to Muslims, present articles from Tatars, Circassians, Georgians, and Turkmen people, provide information about Turks living in regions under Russian hegemony, and compare the implementation of the Ottoman Constitution (Kanun-i Esasi) in different parts of the world.¹⁰⁸ The

Sabri would eventually be subjected to assault and his office would be raided and devastated. The authorities in Filibe were eagerly awaiting such an incident, anticipating the downfall of the government. [Esasen Ali Fehmi'nin Filibe'de ikametden korkarak Cenevre'ye çekilmiş olması ve oradan yazıp burada biraderi tarafından tab edilen neşriyatı Bulgarların kin ve garazlerini tezyid etmekte bulunması cihetiyle günün birinde biraderi Sabri'nin bir yerde darp ve idarehanesinin basılıp perişan edileceği, Filibe'deki istigayı hükümet-i seniyye'nin intizar eyledikleri bir hakikatti.]

104 Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 74.

105 *Ibid.*

106 *Ibid.*

107 *Ahali*, 22 Teşrinievvel 1322, 4.

108 “Mütalaat-ı Siyasiye,” *Ahali*, 29 Teşrinisani 1322, 1.

newspaper declared that it would serve the ideas of freedom and constitutionalism and criticize Sultan Abdülhamid, just like *Muvazene*, while remaining neutral.¹⁰⁹

During this time, Ali Fehmi decided to join the Young Turks in Geneva in November 1906, but he could not continue publishing the newspaper in Switzerland.¹¹⁰ He left Geneva sometime between 1906 and 1907. His father, who resided in Filibe, informed the Ottoman officials that he had been invited to Egypt and, along with his friends, had boarded a ship from Suez heading towards Indian waters.¹¹¹ Upon receiving this information, the Bulgarian Commissioner issued a warning, and Ali Fehmi was closely monitored to ensure he did not engage in any anti-government activities; and various precautionary plans were made to prevent him from making any anti-government attempts.¹¹² Ottoman officials discovered that Ali Fehmi had actually gone to Egypt upon the invitation of a member of the Khedive's family, but he did not meet anyone in Tur Sinai and he had misled those around him by claiming to travel with a group of seven. His real intention, it was alleged, was to go to Afghanistan, and he had to go through Egypt because he could not cross the Russian borders.¹¹³ Ali Fehmi chose to take the route through Tur-i Sina (Sinai) because his acquaintances, who were fugitives like him, had safely traveled to Afghanistan in the same manner from Yemen. These acquaintances included fugitive Major Hüsnü, fugitive Doctor Münir from Dersaadet (Istanbul), Ali Rıza, who was a *mülazım* (sublieutenant) in Çarhçı, and Fazıl and Reşid, who were students at Mekteb-i Tıbbiye (Medical School). They had taken this route to ensure a safe journey, and Ali Fehmi followed suit. These details about Ali Fehmi were reported to the government through spies, and he was unaware that he had provided all the information about himself

109 Karagöz, *Bulgaristan Türk Basını*, 29.

110 Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 74.

111 BOA, A.}MTZ.(05), 19/133/1, H-4-11-1325.

112 BOA, İ..HUS., 161/70, H-27-11-1325.

113 BOA, A.}MTZ.(05), 19/133/2, H-4-11-1325.

to one of the spies—the workings of Ottoman surveillance that he constantly criticized in his newspaper.¹¹⁴

It is known that Ali Fehmi engaged in Pan-Turkist activities in Afghanistan, served as an advisor to the Ministry of Finance, maintained regular communication with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), and informed the organization about his activities.¹¹⁵ In late 1906, Ali Fehmi was invited by the Emir of Afghanistan, Habib Allah, to Kabul, and his arrival to Kabul coincided with the Young Revolution of July 1908.¹¹⁶ He served as the Minister of Finance with the title of “Müşir-i Sultan” until he left Kabul.¹¹⁷ In fact, most of the Ottoman subjects who went to Afghanistan were Ottoman exiles and were active members of the Young Turk revolutionary ideology. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to assert that all Ottoman subjects who journeyed to Afghanistan were members of the Young Turk movement.¹¹⁸

Ali Fehmi’s oratory skills, his ability to recruit Turks to Afghanistan, his efforts to reorganize the revenue system, and the schemes he proposed for irrigation development made him a character closely monitored not only by the Ottoman government but also by British intelligence agents while he was in Afghanistan.¹¹⁹ After the Young Turk Revolution, Ali Fehmi came to Istanbul with an *Irade-i Seniye* (imperial edict) and continued to publish *Muvazene* in Istanbul for a few more months.¹²⁰ Following the modernization campaign initiated during the Habib-Allah period in Afghanistan, even after Ali Fehmi’s return to Istanbul, numerous Ottoman technicians, teachers, politicians, military officers, and physicians continued to journey to Afghanistan to serve under the Emir’s administration.¹²¹

114 BOA, A.}MTZ.(05), 18/137, H-18-11-1325.

115 Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 74.

116 Faiz Ahmed, *Afghanistan Rising: Islamic Law and Statecraft between the Ottoman and British Empires* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 86-87.

117 Karagöz, *Bulgaristan Türk Basını*, 120.

118 Ahmed, *Afghanistan Rising*, 93-94.

119 *Ibid*, 87.

120 *Ibid*, 120.

121 *Ibid*, 88.

3.2.7 *Enemy of Civilization: Ali Fehmi, the Asian (Medeniyet Düşmanı Asyalı Ali Fehmi)*

The last issue of *Muvazene*, in which Ali Fehmi summarized his life story, was published on October 20, 1911, in Istanbul. According to this issue, Ali Fehmi was residing at number 32 on Ayasofya Tramway Street in 1911. He emphasized in his newspaper that he did not endure hardships for personal gain but rather worked for the welfare of his nation. Despite being belittled by some for his relations with Afghanistan, he stated that “Ali Fehmi, the Asian (Asyalı Ali Fehmi)” has finally reunited with his beloved nation and homeland, and his family and brother had also escaped all dangers by now.¹²²

According to the records in the Minutes of the Assembly of Deputies (Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi), Ali Fehmi had sent a telegram to the assembly on November 11, 1908 and the telegram was read during the first session on December 23, 1908. From the telegram, it can be understood that Ali Fehmi was assigned to reform the Ministry of Finance in Capital of Afghanistan (Darüssaltana-ı Kabil). In the telegram, he first described the years he spent struggling in prisons, hiding in forests under harsh conditions, attempting to cross national borders, and facing pressure not only from foreign officials, but also from imperial officials. He emphasized that this experience had been common to anyone seeking freedom. After congratulating Enver and Niyazi Bey on the declaration of the constitutional monarchy, Ali Fehmi, with his didactic style inherited from his profession as an educator, began to give advice to the assembly, demonstrating his impressive oratory skills.¹²³

122 “Arz-ı Meram,” *Muvazene*, 376. Sayı, 5 Teşrinievvel 1327 (18 Ekim 1911), 1.

123 TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, Devre: 1, İçtima: 4, Cilt: 1, 30-31. “Representatives who possess the mandate of representing the country internally and externally! True and esteemed representatives who are the true source of hope for the nation and state's future! (...) You have resolved to act righteously. To be able to carry out righteous actions, first seek the truth. (...) Sacrifice for the sake of those who have sacrificed their youth, families, and lives for their homeland, and show respect to their honorable spirits. (...) Despite the current challenges and future dangers, strive to ensure the stability of the administration. Therefore,

Afterwards, he invited the assembly to consider all Turks as one nation, one race, and one language, and to unite all Turks worldwide under one roof. He encouraged the establishment of a centralized and spiritual policy for Turks living in Russian, Chinese, and Afghan territories. He requested the dispatch of selfless officials, rather than those seeking personal gain, to these regions, and if that was not possible, he suggested entrusting this task to the officials who had come this far.¹²⁴

Ali Fehmi stated that he was motivated by a desire to serve his own state and nation during his one-year service in Afghanistan and sought to maintain the existing allegiance between the two states. Upon his arrival in Afghanistan, he had met with the Emir and his brother, and Serdar Nasrullah informed Ali Fehmi that the religious and political interests of the Ottoman Empire and Afghanistan were intertwined. The Emir of Afghanistan even stated that his country was a branch of the Ottoman Empire and that if anything happened to the branch, the whole body would be affected, and if anything happened to the body, Afghanistan would not be able to survive. Ali Fehmi was received with respect and reverence as a representative of the Ottoman Empire in Afghanistan, witnessing the growing expectations of Afghanistan from Istanbul. He tried to reflect this in his telegrams to the assembly, emphasizing that this responsibility belonged to the deputies in Istanbul. Ultimately, as a formality, he requested that a letter be written from the assembly to the Emir of Afghanistan.¹²⁵ Ali Fehmi, who was “thousands of hours away from his homeland,” expressed his loyalty to his country and nation and paid his

be true and genuine advocates of freedom. [Ey vatanın dahilen ve haricen vekâleti sıfatını haiz olan mebusanı, ey vatanperverânın mercii âli ve hakikisi olan mebusları, ey istikbali millet ve devletin ümid-i yegânesi (...). İlk evvel doğru işlemeye azmediniz. Doğru iş görebilmek için evvelâ doğruları arayınız. (...) Vatanları uğrunda gençliklerini, ailelerini, canlarını feda etmiş olan nam-ı bâ-ihtiramlarına, mukaddes ruhlarına hürmeten fedakârlık ediniz. (...) Halin fenalığına, istikbalin tehlikelerine rağmen idarenin teminine çalışınız, işte bunun için salim ve hakiki hürriyetperver olunuz.]”

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

respects to the assembly. He congratulated the Constitutional Law and concluded his telegram by sending good wishes to the ministers.¹²⁶

He then went to Damascus in 1912, where he served in the Tahrir-i Musakafat presidency and worked in the commission for resettling Muslim refugees from the war-torn areas. During the First World War in 1914, he served on the Greek-Armenian deportation commission and carried out his duties in Akşehir. In 1915, he went to Izmir and then returned to Istanbul, where he worked as the Director of General of Refugee Affairs (*Muhacirin Müdiriyet-i Umumiyesi Sevkiyat-ı Hariciye*). In 1919, “he was charged by Ottoman tribunals set up under Allied pressure to investigate crimes committed against the Armenians during the war.”¹²⁷ Ali Fehmi was assassinated at his home in Kartal in 1922.¹²⁸ Methodieva considered the possibility that Ali Fehmi was killed by an Armenian due to an issue related to the deportation order.¹²⁹

Overall, Ali Fehmi is a character who, along with the ups and downs in his life, is challenging to firmly classify or identify within the historical context. However, Ali Fehmi has become a primary source conveying the experiences of Muslims in Bulgaria. While each valuable study in the literature provides accurate and substantial information about the region’s history, revisionist approaches focusing on individual narratives better convey people’s experiences within the historical context. This perspective contrasts with “concentrating on the concerns of today or the past” approach, which broadens historians’ perspective and eliminates the possibility of missing out historical details. In this regard, the biography of Ali Fehmi and the *Muvazene* newspaper carry critical importance by addressing a missing aspect in the mainstream “history of minorities in Bulgaria” literature -how the Muslim minority in Bulgaria experienced the new context. As Ali Akyıldız points out, even if documents are legally

126 Ibid.

127 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 112.

128 BOA, DH.EUM.AYŞ., 59/30, H-15-06-1340.

129 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 113.

sound, they cannot be properly evaluated without considering the historical background. Conclusions drawn from sources that are not contextualized within the reality and overall structure of the period in historical research can either be limited or misleading.¹³⁰ To complete the research about Ali Fehmi, in addition to his life story, *Muvazene* and what it tells historians, which is the next chapter's subject, holds great significance.

130 Ali Akyıldız, *Tarihçilik ve Yöntem Üzerine*, (İstanbul: Timaş Akademi, 2021), 70.

Ali Fehmi's Muvazene Newspaper (1897-1898)

Ali Fehmi had served as a teacher and school principal within the borders of the Ottoman Empire for eight years. However, due to allegations of being associated with the Young Turks, he was compelled to resign from his position. Despite making numerous job applications for eight months, he received no response. After this, Ali Fehmi returned to his family in Filibe and decided to start a career in journalism. On September 1, 1897, he launched the *Muvazene* newspaper. Over the course of eight years, *Muvazene* became the longest-running and most popular Turkish-language newspaper in Bulgaria. Taking advantage of press freedom in Bulgaria, the newspaper reflected both Ali Fehmi's perspective and that of his readers on the living standards in Bulgaria. Simultaneously, *Muvazene* symbolized the period of acceptance among the Muslim population, specifically the 1890s and beyond, that they were now under Bulgarian rule. This acceptance was markedly different from the passive resistances that had drawn the attention of Bulgarian authorities in the 1880s. Under the Bulgarian authority, Muslims were developing a new collective consciousness. In line with this context, Ali Fehmi focused on matters such as religious endowments (vakıf), the mufti institution, Muslim schools, and maladministration of Muslims. In other words, *Muvazene* became a source shedding light on the social life of Bulgarian Muslims on the eve of the twentieth century.

Muvazene appealed to anyone who identified himself as ‘Bulgarian Muslim.’ In line with his eight-year teaching experiences, Ali Fehmi approached his readers with a didactic rhetoric. He wrote many articles inviting people to read and research more, to think critically, and not to believe everything immediately. At the beginning, Ali Fehmi’s critical writings only bothered the Ottoman government and the government labeled *Muvazene* as a corrupted newspaper due to its Young Turk ideas. Indeed, for a long time, *Muvazene* had been a proponent of Young Turk ideas in Bulgaria’s free environment. However, as the historical context grew more tense in the early twentieth century, his provocative articles began targeting Russians and Bulgarians as well. When Ali Fehmi’s writings started criticizing Russia and Bulgaria, he was deported from Bulgaria and his printing press was shut down in 1905.

This chapter discusses the coverage of *Muvazene* in its first year. The first fifty-two issues show how Ali Fehmi handled the matters in a politically correct manner during this entirely new process for him. In the newspaper’s first year, there were no expressions that would disturb the Bulgarian government or directly targeted the Ottoman Sultan. However, *Muvazene* vehemently criticized any kind of irresponsibility that resulted in maladministration, particularly targeting Ottoman officials in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, *Muvazene* published these criticisms not for a specific ideology but for the benefit of Bulgaria’s Muslims. And accordingly, it emphasized that the most beneficial action was to organize, raise awareness, read, learn, and evaluate the opportunities offered by the Bulgarian government.

In what follows, this chapter first discusses *Muvazene*’s vision and whether it could achieve its goals or not. Then the discussion focuses on the headlines of *Muvazene*, giving some examples of for each. In addition, excerpts from Ali Fehmi’s articles are presented as well as an analysis of the letters sent by readers. At the end of the chapter, Ali Fehmi’s question-and-answer competitions are presented, which also provides an example of *Muvazene*’s communication tactics.

§ 4.1 The *Muvazene* Newspaper

The first issue of *Muvazene* newspaper was printed on September 1, 1897 at the Tirgovska Printing House in Filibe.¹ The weekly newspaper *Muvazene* completed its first year with the 52nd issue dated August 31, 1898. *Muvazene* stated its purpose under its subtitle which defined it as “a weekly impartial newspaper based on balancing and comparing elementary and fundamental powers, civil law and personal judgment and protection.”² In the “Address and Others” section of the newspaper’s headline, the owner and chief editor is mentioned as “Ali Fehmi, graduate of Mekteb-i Mülkiye and Ulum-i Siyasiye,” and his names with these titles remained the same for a year. In the same section, a paragraph outlining the purpose of *Muvazene* appears, stating that the newspaper aims to provide scientific, statistical, and pedagogical information. It promised readers that any kind of letter would be accepted for publication both from the territories under Ottoman rule and from other countries, as long as they did not contain hate speech or blind partisanship. These letters would be published impartially within the limits of available space, and unpublished letters would be returned. Additionally, it is stated that incoming letters should be written in both Turkish and Bulgarian languages. The letters which were not published would not be sent back to their authors.³

During its first year in Filibe, *Muvazene* was sold in the Şerif Ağa’s tobacco shop situated opposite the social club. The price of *Muvazene* in Filibe was 20 centime, while it was 1 kuruş in the Ottoman Empire. The subscription fees *Muvazene* in Bulgaria were 10 franc annually, 5 franc semi-annually, and 3 franc quarterly; in foreign countries were 16 franc

1 Karagöz, *Bulgaristan Türk Basını*, 119.

2 *Muvazene*, 1. Sayı, 20 Ağustos 1313 (1 Eylül 1897), 1. “Kuvve-i iptidaiye ve esasiyeyi muvazene ve mukayese, hukuk-u medeniye ve şahsiyeyi muhakeme ve muhafaza esasına müstenid haftalık bitaraf gazetedir.”

3 *Muvazene*, 1. Sayı, 20 Ağustos 1313 (1 Eylül 1897), 1. “Siyasi, ilmi, istatistiki, pedagojik muharrerat ve garazdan ari her nev mektublar memnuniyetle derç olunur. Derc olunmayan mektublar iade olunmaz.”

annually, 8 franc semi-annually, and 4 quarterly; in the Ottoman Empire, subscriptions cost 6 mecrediye annually, 3 mecrediye semi-annually, and 1 mecrediye quarterly. The monthly subscription was 1 franc for Bulgaria, 1.20 franc for foreign countries, and 10 kuruş for the Ottoman Empire. Subscription fees were collected in advance, and upon payment, newspapers were sent to readers' addresses along with promissory notes.⁴ Letters sent from the Ottoman Empire and foreign countries were required to address "Ali Fehmi, Director and Editor-in-Chief of the '*Muvazene*' newspaper in Filibe."⁵ Letters sent from Bulgaria needed to be written in both Turkish and Bulgarian languages.⁶

During the publication of *Muvazene* in Varna, it was printed at the Vzaimnost Printing House. According to the issue dated August 14, 1901, number 198, subscription fees for *Muvazene* in Bulgaria were 10 franc annually, 5 franc semi-annually, and 3 franc quarterly. For other countries, the annual fee was 16 franc, semi-annual was 8 franc, and quarterly was 4 franc. The price for a copy of the newspaper was 20 centime in Bulgaria and 1 kuruş abroad.⁷

In its 376th issue, which came out on October 18, 1911, *Muvazene* outlined the subscription terms for the Ottoman Empire as follows: annual subscription of 108 kuruş, six-month subscription of 54 kuruş, three-month subscription of 27 kuruş, and a single copy cost 10 para.⁸ For foreign countries, the annual subscription was 40 franc, six-month subscription was 20 franc, three-month subscription was 10 franc, and a single copy cost was 10 centime. The same issue mentioned a note regarding Russia, fixing an annual rate of "17 paper rubles in Russia." The address in the 376th issue was listed as "32 Ayasofya Street in Istanbul, owner and editor-in-chief of the '*Muvazene*' newspaper, Ali Fehmi."⁹ This

4 "Abone ve Şeraiti," *Muvazene*, 1. Sayı, 20 Ağustos 1313 (1 Eylül 1897), 1.

5 Ibid. "Filibe'de '*Muvazene*' gazetesini müdür ve muharriri Ali Fehmi."

6 Ibid.

7 "Abone ve Şeraiti," *Muvazene*, 198. Sayı, 1 Ağustos 1317 (14 Ağustos 1911), 1.

8 "Abone ve Şeraiti," *Muvazene*, 376. Sayı, 5 Teşrinievvel 1327 (18 Ekim 1911), 1.

9 Ibid.

issue was printed at the Müşterekü'l-Menfaa Ottoman Printing House on Ebussuud Street. Under the "Address and Others" section, the French explanation further specified it as "Ebussuud Street No: 27."¹⁰

The first issue of *Muvazene* contained an article titled "Mesele-i Maruzatımız" that introduced the newspaper's mission and summarized its vision.¹¹ Authored by Ali Fehmi, this article outlined the principles that *Muvazene* would follow throughout its publication, the language it would use, the topics it would cover, and the benefits readers would gain. The first principle highlighted that while *Muvazene* was a serious newspaper, it would strive to use clear and simple language whenever possible. Scientific articles might retain complex terminology, but explanations for foreign terms would be provided where needed to accommodate readers' understanding. This approach aimed to serve both well-educated readers' intellectual needs and those new to reading, encouraging them to gather information, read more, and gain awareness of global events.¹²

According to the second principle, *Muvazene* promised to inform readers about events that occurred in the past week, whether good or bad. Events relevant to the reader base and the general public would be prioritized. The newspaper committed to presenting events from newspapers in Turkish, Bulgarian, and French, providing brief summaries of select ones according to readers' needs.¹³

In line with the third principle, the interpretation part would be left entirely to the readers. This implied that Ali Fehmi would not impose his own opinions or propagate a particular viewpoint, expecting readers to discern right from wrong. *Muvazene* pledged to leave the evaluation of

10 "Adres ve Saire," *Muvazene*, 376. Sayı, 5 Teşrinievvel 1327 (18 Ekim 1911), 1..

11 "Mesele-i Maruzatımız," *Muvazene*, 1. Sayı, 20 Ağustos 1313 (1 Eylül 1897), 1.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid. "What we mean is that our newspaper will also serve as the alphabet requirement for the formation and progression of the nation's elementary forces, and it will possess the duties of communication and consultation for those who have been entrusted with the fundamentals of power. [Demek istiyoruz ki gazetemiz aynı zamanda milletin kuvve-ibtidaiyelerinin teşkil ve tevessü'üne hadim elifba hâcesi, kuvve-i esasiyelerini teklîm etmiş olanların da muhabere ve müşavere vezâifini haiz olacaktır.]"

news, their correctness and incompleteness to the readers' discretion. By doing so, the newspaper indirectly assigned the task of critical thinking to the readers, seeking to foster a sense of dialogue and interaction.¹⁴

Emphasizing its commitment to impartiality, another significant point was *Muvazene*'s declaration that it would accept all types of letters without any prejudice. This principle was closely related to the meanings carried by the chosen name "Muvazene" and the subtitle "impartial." The term "Muvazene" means "equilibrium" and Ali Fehmi aimed to establish his newspaper based on balance and impartiality.

The third principle of the newspaper noted that "Everyone works with all kinds of efforts to secure their needs. No one can sustain production if their income falls short of expenses."¹⁵ In this sentence, Ali Fehmi emphasized that the most fundamental drive for getting into this business was survival and his need to make a living, and he warned his readers in advance that there would be no tolerance for laxity in payment. He then went on to discuss the expenses related to publishing a newspaper in Filibe, the requirement of having an idadi school degree to publish a newspaper in Bulgaria, and the necessity of being a Bulgarian national to publish a newspaper in the country. Additionally, he mentioned that in order to translate news from European newspapers, a translator was necessary. Ali Fehmi emphasized that he possessed all these qualities needed. As many newspapers could not keep up with both translation expenses and the costs of publishing in Turkish in Bulgaria, they were going bankrupt and closing down. Those that continued had to seek,

14 Ibid. "Relevant matters will be gathered and taken into account according to the needs of circumstances and time, in a relatively short period, and their accuracy or fallacy will be left to examination and assessment through reading newspapers and conducting analysis and comparisons in line with general views and aspirations. [Münasibleri ihtiyaç-ı hal ve zamana, temaliyat ve temenniyat-ı umumiyeye göre oldukça kısa bir suretde alınarak doğruluğu, eğriliği gazete okunarak muhakeme ve muvazenelerine terk ve havale olunacaktır.]"

15 Ibid. "[Herkes her dürlü mesaisiyle temin-i ihtiyacı için çalışır. Varidatı musarafatına tekabüledemeyen imalden hiç kimse devam edemez.]"

though reluctantly, financial support from powerful entities (politely implying the sponsorship of the Ottoman state), which then compromised their neutrality in the process.¹⁶

However, Ali Fehmi, being capable of managing all aspects of publishing by himself, acknowledged that, due to the fact that his sole source of income was journalism, he openly expressed his desire for his skills to be financially rewarded. Those wanting to subscribe to *Muvazene* were registered as subscribers by indicating in advance for how many months they wanted to subscribe and by sending their payment in advance.¹⁷ On the last page of the newspaper, in the lower left corner, the “Open Letters”¹⁸ section reported the status of payments and the dispatch of newspapers for those who paid each week. It is evident that Ali Fehmi kept his distance from borrowing money or seeking other forms of assistance to publish his newspaper.¹⁹

During the period when *Muvazene* newspaper was published, the situation did not appear to be very promising. Ali Fehmi was aware of how schools and educational activities lagged behind across the region when compared to vibrant Bulgarian institutions. According to general consensus, there were concerns that if things continued in the same way, Bulgarian Muslims would be reduced to the status of working class in Bulgaria. Ali Fehmi associated the continuity of his newspaper with the progress and advancement of the Muslim nation in the country, which helped him legitimize the publication of his newspaper. In other words, this profession was not merely a means for Ali Fehmi to make a living by collecting subscriptions fees from readers. It was also to serve the ad-

16 Ibid. “*The provision of our necessities is based on a small amount of current funds, but we need to secure our future. [Bizim zaruriyemizin temini, gazetemizin devamı hususunda pek cüz’i bir varidata, fakat te’min-i istikbale ihtiyacımız vardır.]*”

17 Ibid.

18 “Açık Mektublar,” Ibid.

19 “Mesele-i Maruzatımız,” Ibid.

vancement of Muslims living in Bulgaria, a mission that even the Bulgarian government desired.²⁰ If Bulgarian Muslims could attain the capacity to distinguish between good and bad, then human virtues, civilization, and equality could naturally emerge. For the continued publication of *Muvazene*, economic stability and regular payment were necessary. In this context, regular payments requested from readers were considered to be a modest sacrifice, given Ali Fehmi's skills and the social role assumed by *Muvazene*.

Concerned about the prospects of Muslims losing their social status and their inability to progress, Ali Fehmi, leveraging his eight years of teaching experience, declared his commitment to working for improvement of education. He mentioned that he would use his educational experience in his commentary on issues related to schools and endowments (*vakıfs*). *Muvazene* would not only provide information but also instill awareness of rights, pursuit of justice, differentiation between good and bad, especially among the Muslim population in Eastern Rumelia, all the while presenting the truth as it was.²¹

In its first issue, *Muvazene* justified its existence given the situation of Muslims in Bulgaria. In promising to fulfill the needs of the Muslim community in Bulgaria, the newspaper invited its readers to contribute to its mission, seeking to create a community around the newspaper. The aim was for knowledge and progress to be in the service of the entire population. For civilization, Muslims needed to learn and improve themselves. While *Muvazene* embraced the principle of neutrality and promised to encourage readers to develop their own ideas, Ali Fehmi's didactic rhetoric, in line with his eight-year teaching career, was evident.

20 Ibid. "In the region under constitutional rule, the progress of Muslims in Bulgaria is also desired by the government. [*İdare-i şurutıyeye tabi olan Bulgaristan emaretinde islam-ların terakkisi hükümetçe de matlubdur.*]"

21 Ibid.

According to the fourth clause of its mission statement, Ali Fehmi highlighted a number of preconditions to continue publishing an impartial newspaper.²² Firstly, Filibe made Ali Fehmi's work easier because the city was a well-connected one to local, regional and global circuits. The presence of roads, telegraphs, post offices, telephones, and radios in Filibe were great opportunities for a journalist to practice the profession in the city. Telegraphs incoming from Europe and Istanbul passed through Filibe, and agency telegrams were made available for free.²³ Secondly, he emphasized that the newspaper would be get bogged down with politics since he would not allow partisanship in his newspaper. Thirdly, he mentioned the city library with "around forty-four thousand volumes" that was open for everyone's use.²⁴ According to Ali Fehmi, the most famous political, scientific, statistical, and pedagogical newspapers from all over the world were freely available to journalists via the city library for free.²⁵ Given these favorable conditions conducive to journalism, Ali Fehmi's initiative to publish *Muvazene* was set out for success.²⁶

A year into the publication of the newspaper, Ali Fehmi announced that *Muvazene* had completed its first year, effectively celebrating its first-year anniversary, which provided an opportunity for a self-appraisal.²⁷ After fifty-two weeks had passed, Ali Fehmi proudly stated that he kept his promises and fulfilled his commitments from the first issue on. Here Ali Fehmi not only discussed the qualities a newspaper reader should

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid; Some of the newspapers mentioned have been personally examined by Ali Fehmi, while the names of others are included in *Muvazene* due to references in the news sources. Among them, there are nearly 60 newspapers, including *Tan*, *Daily News*, *Peti Jurnal*, *Papa Gal*, *Figaro*, *Treşak*, *Times*, *Mir*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telgraf*, *Neue Freie Presse*, *Şimalî Almanya*, *Otizof*, *İstandar*, *İttifak*, *New York Harrelet*, *Novosti Frankfurt*, *Hükümet*, *Evlad-ı Vatan*, *Akropol*, *Nationaltidende*, *Gayret*, *Sada-yı Millet*, *Politishe Korrespondenz*, and *Tercüman*.

27 "Arz-ı Meram," *Muvazene*, 52. Sayı, 19 Ağustos 1314 (31 Ağustos 1898), 1.

possess, but also presented a vision of social order he envisioned. He emphasized the importance of not merely believing events as they were recorded, but also invited to considering other interpretations, noting the necessity to keep in mind the laws of the country where the newspaper was published and the particular circumstances under which the articles and news were written.²⁸

§ 4.2 Major Topics Covered in *Muvazene*

4.2.1 “News From Bulgaria”

“News from Bulgaria” is one of the most important headings of *Muvazene* because it provides weekly news related to diplomatic, social, economic matters happening in the region, and news that concerned all the communities living in Bulgaria. Under this heading, news included coverage of diplomatic relations between the Bulgarian prince and other foreign leaders, agriculture in Bulgaria, educational activities, endowment properties belonging to Muslims, petty crimes, and many other topics that affected the lives of the people.

Among the news that can be diplomatically classified under this heading are relations between Bulgaria and Austria, the Bulgarian prince’s journey to Istanbul, mutual visits between princes of Bulgaria and Montenegro,²⁹ a procession held in Filibe for the birthday of Bulgarian heir Prince Boris,³⁰ the appointment of Mustafa Eyüp Efendi as an envoy to

28 Ibid.

29 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 24. Sayı, 4 Şubat 1313 (16 Şubat 1898), 2.

30 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 37. Sayı, 6 Mayıs 1314 (18 Mayıs 1898), 2.

the retinue of a Bulgarian merchant deputy sent to Edirne,³¹ clashes between certain *çetes* and Ottoman soldiers,³² the alliance between the Bulgarian Prince and the Ottoman government, which legitimized Prince Ferdinand as the governor of Eastern Rumelia.³³ Other news included the establishment of the Bulgarian parliament, the admission of Bulgarian soldiers who fled to Russia back to Bulgaria, statements by Bulgarian commissioner Nasuhi Bey that the Ottoman Empire did not amass troops on the Macedonia border, among others.³⁴

This section provided insights into the resolution of unresolved issues between Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria.³⁵ The news also discussed the reclaiming of Bulgarian churches that were previously seized by Greeks under the Ottoman rule.³⁶ The other diplomatic news included the evacuation of Thessaly,³⁷ and the plans of Macedonian committees for a con-

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- 31 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 3. Sayı, 3 Eylül 1313 (15 Eylül 1897), 2. "Edirne's newly established representative of Bulgarian merchants is accompanied by Mustafa Eyüp Efendi, a graduate of the Filibe high school. Mustafa Eyüp Efendi is known to have graduated from Filibe secondary school. He is a well-mannered and hardworking young man. [Edirne yeni tesis olunan Bulgaristan tüccar vekili maiyetine Filibe bulgar kinezyası (idadi) mezunlarından olup Filibe mekteb-i rüşdiyesinden mustafa Eyüp efendinin taayyün olunduğu işidilmiştir. Eyüb efendi terbiyeli, çalışkan bir gençdir.]"
- 32 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 7. Sayı, 1 Teşrinievvel 1313 (13 Ekim 1897), 2. "Some Bulgarian newspapers have sarcastically written about the permissions granted between certain gangs and the authorities. [Birtakım çeteler ile asa kir-i redife arasında müsaa-demeler Vuku bulduğunu Bulgar gazeteleri istihza suretiyle yazmıştır.]"
- 33 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 7. Sayı, 2 Teşrinievvel 1313 (13 Ekim 1897), 1.
- 34 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 30. Sayı, 18 Mart 1314 (30 Mart 1898), 2.
- 35 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 7. Sayı, 1 Teşrinievvel 1313 (13 Ekim 1897), 2.
- 36 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 12. Sayı, 12 Teşrinisani 1313 (24 Kasım 1897), 2. "During its time, Turkey used to portray Bulgarians as Greeks, and they engaged in intrigues. In fact, Bulgarian churches were completely seized by Greeks. In the current situation, Bulgarians are gradually reclaiming their churches. [Türkiye zamanında Rumlar bulgarları da Rum göstermekle Entrika yaparlar idi Hatta Bulgarların kiliseleri büsbütün Rumlar tarafından zaptolunmuş idi şimdiki halde Bulgarlar birer birer kiliselerini geri almaktadır.]"
- 37 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 41. Sayı, 3 Haziran 1314 (15 Haziran 1898), 2.

gress in Sofia to be held on August 7th, where they would present a memorandum to the Great Powers.³⁸ “News from Bulgaria” offered details about socialists that attracted Bulgarian government’s attention,³⁹ celebrations of Vasilevski’s 25th anniversary,⁴⁰ the government’s decision to return Ayia Trias Church to the Greeks.⁴¹ It also mentioned that the Muslim community in Filibe felt discomfort when all shops, including those of Muslims, were closed on the Feast of the Assumption in Bulgaria.⁴² The celebration of the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius is included under “News of Bulgaria” as well.⁴³ In sum, *Muvazene*’s coverage offered various diplomatic news that possessed great significance for both the Bulgarian government and communities living in the country.

“News From Bulgaria” also paid attention to education-related matters. For instance, information was given about the progress of repairs to Muslim schools in Hasköy, and the sacrifices made by the people of Hasköy for the education of their children, which were presented with praise. Tensions among teachers in Hasköy were also mentioned.⁴⁴ Other

38 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 49. Sayı, 29 Temmuz 1314 (10 Ağustos 1898), 2.

39 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 3. Sayı, 3 Eylül 1313 (15 Eylül 1897), 2. “*Within Bulgaria, socialists (...) attract the attention of the government. Their newspapers, brochures, congresses, and speeches are noteworthy. The first socialist publication to reach our printing press was their newspaper. Due to their popularity among the public, they are sometimes treated as being as slippery as a snake and their ideas are considered poison. Socialists are against the concept of serving humanity and are opposed to the concept of serving humanity. [Bulgaristan dahilinde sosyalistler (...) hükümetin nazarıdikkatini celb etmektedir. Bunların cerideleri, risaleleri, kongreleri, nutukları şayan-ı dikkattir. Matbaamıza ilk evvel gelen sosyalist ceridesidir. Ahali taraftarı oldukları cihetle bazı mahallerde kendileri yılan gibi addolunmakda, fikirleri zehir gibi farz olunmaktadır. Sosyalistler hadim-i beşeriyet fikrinde, hadim-i insaniyet aleyhindedirler.]*”

40 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 26. Sayı, 18 Şubat 1313 (2 Mart 1898), 2.

41 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 15. Sayı, 3 Kanunuevvel 1313 (15 Aralık 1897), 2.

42 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 52. Sayı, 19 Ağustos 1314 (31 Ağustos 1898), 2.

43 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 38. Sayı, 13 Mayıs 1314, (25 Mayıs 1898), 2.

44 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 5. Sayı, 17 Eylül 1313, (29 Eylül 1897), 2.

items included the situation of around seventy destitute Bulgarian teachers in Köstendil,⁴⁵ the passing away of a hardworking young female teacher in Filibe due to illness⁴⁶ and the death of Hafız Mustafa Efendi, who had been a teacher for twenty years.⁴⁷ In this section, efforts to improve Jewish,⁴⁸ Armenian, and Bulgarian schools in Filibe were commended, and Muslims were advised to do the same.⁴⁹ The fact that schools in large villages with around 400 households had only one teacher for 100-150 students was a source of criticism by Ali Fehmi, while the promise of a fund of 2,000 francs from the Filibe municipality to Muslim schools was met with joy.⁵⁰

In "News from Bulgaria," Ali Fehmi also engaged in inter-newspaper dialogue. For example, he congratulated the newly established newspaper *Doğru Yol* and later extended congratulations to the newspaper *Balkan*, which started being published in Rusçuk.⁵¹ Two newspapers published in Filibe in Bulgarian and Greek languages praised *Muvazene*, and Ali Fehmi thanked them in return. An incident where the publisher of the *Hukuk* newspaper in Varna was arrested by a spy was also reported to readers.⁵²

In "News from Bulgaria," two prominent topics related to Bulgarian Muslims also found coverage: the Muslim schools and the future of endowment properties in Bulgaria. These two topics are linked to the issue of "misuse of duty." According to Ali Fehmi, officials who received salaries from the state but failed to fulfill their duties were misappropriating funds that could otherwise be used for Muslim schools. This situation led to the lack of education for Muslim children and teachers working under difficult conditions, almost voluntarily.

45 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 2. Sayı, 27 Ağustos 1313 (8 Eylül 1897), 2.

46 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 19. Sayı, 31 Kanunuevvel 1313 (12 Ocak 1898), 2.

47 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 52. Sayı, 19 Ağustos 1314 (31 Ağustos 1898), 2.

48 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 38. Sayı, 13 Mayıs 1314, (25 Mayıs 1898), 2.

49 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 28. Sayı, 4 Mart 1314 (16 Mart 1898), 2.

50 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 33. Sayı, 8 Nisan 1314 (20 Nisan 1898), 2.

51 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 44. Sayı, 24 Haziran 1314 (6 Temmuz 1898), 2.

52 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 22. Sayı, 21 Kanunusani 1313 (2 Şubat 1898), 2.

Muvazene noted that local Muslims had long wished for the reform of the *mufti* institution, which had left a significant question mark in their minds.⁵³ For example, the newspaper provided coverage of instances where the mufti was not at his office, and the public, not knowing where the mufti was, had complained to *Muvazene* about it.⁵⁴ Similarly, someone responsible for reading Buhari-i Şerif was not fulfilling his duty. *Muvazene* emphasized that instead of paying such individuals salaries, the money should have been directed towards schools and teachers. While efforts to put underutilized vakıf-owned mosques into initiatives that generate revenue were seen as a necessity, complaints from the Muslim community suggested that such initiatives were indeed lacking.⁵⁵ In another instance, a portion of Alaca Mosque in Filibe, located opposite the club, was annexed to the property of a hotel owner. Nevertheless, imams who took advantage of the roles of these non-revenue-generating mosques continued to receive salaries.⁵⁶

It was alleged that despite the insufficient income of some mosques, their revenues were mixed with those of other mosques to conceal this fact.⁵⁷ There were also claims that in addition to imams, hammams and shopkeepers were given the title of muezzin in mosques, which once

53 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 15. Sayı, 3 Kanunuevvel 1313 (15 Aralık 1897), 2.

54 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 6. Sayı, 24 Eylül 1313 (6 Ekim 1897), 2.

55 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 8. Sayı, 8 Teşrinievvel 1313 (20 Ekim 1897), 2. "Why aren't these people being removed from their positions? In other words, why aren't the funds being allocated to schools and teachers instead? [Bunlar niçin azl olunmuyor yani paralar niçin mekteplere muallimlere verilmiyor?]"

56 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 8. Sayı, 8 Teşrinievvel 1313 (20 Ekim 1897), 2. "Some places, although capable of generating income, are left unused, and in addition to that, a collapsed mosque's imam is still being paid a salary. We can't make sense of it. We don't know whether the public is aware of this or not. (Like Orta Cami) [Bazı yerler muatıl kalmış olduğu halde bunları varidat getirecek bir hale koymak lazım iken yapılmadıktan mada yıkılmış bir caminin imamına hala maaş vermekten bir mana çıkaramıyoruz. Ahalinin haberi var mı yok mu bilemeyiz. (Orta Cami gibi)]"

57 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 19. Sayı, 31 Kanunuevvel 1313 (12 Ocak 1898), 1.

again misappropriated funds.⁵⁸ The Muslim community in Pazarcık similarly strived to uncover the truths related to vakıf matters, and these developments were rapidly reported to the *Muvazene* newspaper.⁵⁹ The Evkaf Administration in Filibe also attempted to placate the public with various excuses to avoid being held accountable in certain matters, as the newspaper reported.⁶⁰ According to Ali Fehmi's writing, individuals bearing the title of vakıf directors were doing nothing but leaving behind a pile of debts after completing their duties.⁶¹ The people of Filibe had been contemplating the inefficacy of the mufti and vakıf institutions for two years. Eventually, a new vakıf director was deemed unnecessary in Filibe, and the budget allocated for that position was distributed among teachers.⁶²

The "News from Bulgaria" section not only discussed problems related to Muslims but also provided information about events that concerned Muslims in general. For instance, an article discussed issues related to Muslim girls and widows working as maids in non-Muslim households.⁶³ The decoration of the city with lights on the occasion of Bara'at night was described. So was the celebration of the birthday of the

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid. *"It is reported that the Filibe Evkaf administration continues to evade accountability by using various excuses as before, attempting to deceive and appease the public in this manner. [Filibe Evkaf idaresinin hesap vermekte evvelki gibi birtakım bahanelerle işi salıdığı ve bu suretle ahaliyi uyutturmaya, avutturmaya çalıştığı haber veriliyor.]"*

61 Ibid. *"It is being questioned what several individuals, informally known by the title of 'Evkaf Director,' have produced apart from consuming money and leaving debts behind. [Evkaf müdürü namı ile gayriresmi olarak kullanılan birkaç kişinin para yemekten, borç bırakmaktan başka ne eser gösterdiği soruluyor.]"*

62 "Bulgaristan Havadisı," *Muvazene*, 29. Sayı, 11 Mart 1314 (23 Mart 1898), 2.

63 "Bulgaristan Havadisı," *Muvazene*, 8. Sayı, 8 Teşrinievvel 1313 (20 Ekim 1897), 2. *"Do not forget that our young girls and widowed women, starting with serving as maids in foreign houses, have their honor compromised. If further negligence occurs, the nation will be held accountable in this world and the hereafter. [Genç kızlarımızın dul kadınlarımızın ecnebi evlerinde hizmetçilikten başlayarak namusları paymal olduğunu unutmayınız daha gaflet olunur ise millet dünya ve ahirette mesuldür.]"*

Prophet Muhammad (Mevlid-i Nebevi) in the city.⁶⁴ The return of Muslim pilgrims to Filibe in good health after the Hajj found coverage, which noted the deaths of two out of fourteen pilgrims.⁶⁵

In the “News from Bulgaria” section, developments related to Muslim progress were also covered. For instance, it is mentioned that a new railway construction had been decided in Bulgaria, but there was still disagreement between the municipality and the government regarding the railway stations.⁶⁶ The establishment of a sugar factory in Sofia,⁶⁷ the relocation of a bridge constructed in Filibe to Stanimaka,⁶⁸ and the founding of a bank by an anonymous company in Sofia⁶⁹ were among the news. Ali Fehmi also reported on a serious accident that was narrowly avoided on the Sofia-Filibe railway line.⁷⁰

Disturbing events, petty crimes, or disasters occurring across Bulgaria were also reflected in the pages of *Muvazene*. For instance, the discovery of an unidentified body two hours away from Filibe, where people of various nationalities were called to identify, was reported.⁷¹ So was the case of a tobacco manufacturer depositing three bags of tobacco as a deposit with Şükrü Efend’s shop, and the soldiers theft of the tobacco.⁷² Horse thefts had apparently increased in Şumnu;⁷³ a thief caught across from Kurşunlu Han was found to be likely suffering from kleptomania;⁷⁴

64 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 48. Sayı, 22 Temmuz 1314 (3 Ağustos 1898), 2.

65 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 45. Sayı, 1 Temmuz 1314 (13 Temmuz 1898), 2.

66 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 6. Sayı, 24 Eylül 1313 (6 Ekim 1897), 2.

67 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 23. Sayı, 28 Kanunusani 1313 (9 Şubat 1898), 2.

68 Ibid.

69 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 52. Sayı, 19 Ağustos 1314 (31 Ağustos 1898), 2.

70 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 45. Sayı, 1 Temmuz 1314 (13 Temmuz 1898), 2.

71 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 2. Sayı, 27 Ağustos 1313 (8 Eylül 1897), 2.

72 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 10. Sayı, 22 Teşrinievvel 1313 (3 Kasım 1897), 2.

73 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 2. Sayı, 27 Ağustos 1313 (8 Eylül 1897), 2.

74 “Açık Mektublar,” *Muvazene*, 22 Teşrinievvel 1313, 2. “Last Thursday, a polite thief named 'lazkar' was caught in front of Kurşunlu Han from a shop owned by a glassworker. This young man is engaged to a beautiful girl from a respectable family. Some polite people even refer to this illness as 'kleptomania' as it afflicts even some well-mannered individuals

Nişan Domanyan, who closed his shop and was heading home, had all his money stolen by thieves.⁷⁵ A fire broke out in the house of Dimitrov, and the firefighters gained Ali Fehmi's admiration and appreciation for their efforts.⁷⁶ A thirteen-year-old Bulgarian girl named Olga threw herself into the Meriç River but was saved by İbrahim Ağa.⁷⁷ In the Maraş neighborhood, two young Bulgarian boys hung a watermelon from a well, but while trying to retrieve it, both fell into the well and drowned.⁷⁸ Outlaw groups had appeared in some areas of Turyan and began to harass some villages at the foot of the Balkans.⁷⁹

Alongside the terrifying events taking place in Bulgaria, there were also various themes related to farming, agriculture, and social life, as they

with the urge to steal. [Geçen perşembe günü Kurşunlu Han karşısında kırancının dükkanından lazkar isminde kibar bir hırsız yakalanmıştır bu genç kibar bir familyaya mensup güzel bir kız ile de nişanlı imiş bazı kibarlar bile çalmak cinnetine Müptela olduğu cihetle bu hastalığa kleptomani derler.]”

75 “Bugaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 6. Sayı, 24 Eylül 1313 (6 Ekim 1897), 2.

76 “Bugaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 30. Sayı, 18 Mart 1314 (30 Mart 1898), 2. “*Let it not be thought that firefighting is an insignificant duty. Those who sacrifice their lives to protect the country from damage and the people from harm are as commendable as heroes. In this regard, we consider it a humanitarian duty to say a few words about the responsibilities of our municipality. The helmets that protect the heads of our firefighters from fire are already priced at 8-10 francs, and the absence of these helmets in some cases, as well as the lack of lanterns when firefighting at night, especially when walls and pillars collapse, are significant shortcomings. Therefore, we draw the municipality's attention to the procurement of the missing helmets and lanterns. [Tulumbacılık ehemmiyetsiz bir vazife addolunmasın. Memeleketi hasardan ahaliyi zarardan vikaye etmek için feda-yı can eden kahramanlar kadar şayanı takdirdri. Bu münasebetle belediyemizin vazife-i asliyesine taalluk eden bir iki söz söylemeyi vazife-i insaniye muktezatından addederiz. İtfaiyemizin başlarına kemikle başlarını ateşten muhafazaya medar olan kasklar zaten 8-10 frank mukabilinde celp ve ictira olunduğu halde bazılarında bu kaskların bulunmaması alelhusus gece vakti amelyab-ı itfaiye esnasında duvarların direklerin yıkıldığını görmek için fakil tesmiye olunan fenerlerin mefkudiyeti büyük kusurlardandır. Binaenaleyh kask ve fakillerin ikmali hususunda belediye heyeti idaresinin nazarı dikkat ve merhametlerini celb ederiz.]”*

77 “Bugaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 39. Sayı, 21 Mayıs 1314 (2 Haziran 1898), 2.

78 “Bugaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 49. Sayı, 29 Temmuz 1314 (10 Ağustos 1898), 2.

79 “Bugaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 46. Sayı, 8 Temmuz 1314 (20 Temmuz 1898), 2.

covered by *Muvazene*. There were encouraging news about agriculture and rice harvests in various parts of Bulgaria from September 28 to October 6, 1897.⁸⁰ In August of 1898, it was reported that there had been a significant amount of rain in Filibe, which was beneficial for vineyards and rice fields.⁸¹ There were reports of profitable beet cultivation.⁸² A train carrying livestock ordered by the Ottoman Empire from Hungary passed through Filibe with 26 carriages.⁸³ And those working in rice harvests owned by Turkish landowners maintained good relations despite the presence of Bulgarian and Catholic laborers.⁸⁴ Meserrethane-i Osmani Company was also noted to have arrived in Filibe.⁸⁵

However, there were certainly negative news among agricultural and social news as well. For example, some individuals were receiving wages for working in rice and rice fields, but they were not actually working.⁸⁶ Drought and winds were causing concerns among farmers.⁸⁷ Overplanting of rice by tenant farmers had led to the deterioration of rice fields in Filibe and Pazarcık.⁸⁸ Tatar farmers in the Harmanlı region had refused to pay taxes, leading to Ottoman military intervention and unrest in the area.⁸⁹

80 "Bugaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, *Muvazene*, 6. Sayı, 24 Eylül 1313 (6 Ekim 1897), 2.

81 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 50. Sayı, 5 Ağustos 1314 (17 Ağustos 1898), 2.

82 Ibid.

83 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 51. Sayı, 12 Ağustos 1314 (24 Ağustos 1898), 2.

84 Ibid.

85 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 32. Sayı, 1 Nisan 1314 (13 Nisan 1898), 2.

86 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 8. Sayı, 8 Teşrinievvel 1314 (20 Ekim 1897), 2. "Some gentlemen claim that while they are enjoying themselves in rice paddy fields and threshing floors, they still receive their full salaries, and they provide 2000 witnesses for this. These officials who complain that their work is too much, I wonder if they have too much work in rice fields or in endowment affairs? [Bazı efendiler çeltik pirinç tarlası harmanlarında kendi işinde eğlencesinde gezdiği halde maaşını tamamen almaktaymış, buna 2000 şahit gösteriyorlar. İşimiz çoktur diye söylenen bu memur efendilerin acaba çeltik işleri mi çok yoksa vakıf işleri mi?]"

87 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 22. Sayı, 21 Kanunusani 1313 (2 Şubat 1898), 2.

88 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 45. Sayı, 1 Temmuz 1314 (13 Temmuz 1898), 2.

89 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 51. Sayı, 12 Ağustos 1314 (24 Ağustos 1898), 2.

Ali Fehmi, who provided a balanced compilation of local news from Bulgaria every week, once remarked, “Yes! Some ladies have a point. Our newspaper always writes sad and sorrowful lines. It is desired that some entertaining articles be written as well.”⁹⁰ Although *Muvazene* did not promise to provide entertaining news, Ali Fehmi explained that he happened to come across an incident that fulfilled this desire of the ladies:

On a Wednesday, a tall, stout woman with blue eyes and dressed in fur began wandering in front of our house. At one point, [...] she took out a white bottle from under her skirt and broke it on the threshold of our street door. The contents of the bottle were seen to be water, olive oil, and other substances. Fortunately, since no one in our house believed in these things, there was no need to panic against those who saw and reported it from outside. [...] The magic was apparently intended to secure our departure from Filibe.⁹¹

Upon learning where the woman lived and who she was, Ali Fehmi, after narrating this incident, expressed his pity for those who believed in these things. He particularly criticized the fact that while other nations were thinking and working to advance their trade and arts, Muslims were wasting time on frivolous matters, highlighting the general ignorance among the population.⁹²

90 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 19. Sayı, 31 Kanunuevvel 1313 (12 Ocak 1898), 2.

91 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 19. Sayı, 31 Kanunuevvel 1313 (12 Ocak 1898), 2. “Geçen çarşamba günü irice uzun boylu, mavi gözlü, kürk giydiği için şişmanca bir kadın bizim evin kapısı önünde dolaşmaya başlar. Bir aralık gelince [...] eteğinin altından bir beyaz şişe çıkararak bizim sokak kapısının eşiğinde kırar. Şişenin içinde su, zeytinyağı ve mevadd-ı saire olduğu görülüyor. Bereket versin ki evde bunlara inanan kimse olmadığından dışarıdan görüp haber verenlere karşı telaş gösterilmemiştir. [...] Yapılan büyücülük bizim Filibe’den çıkıp gitmekliğimiz içinmiş.”

92 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 18. Sayı, 24 Kanunuevvel 1313 (5 Ocak 1898), 3.

4.2.2 “Political Affairs”

Political affairs were issues that were as equally central to Ali Fehmi’s coverage of events in his newspaper. He contextualized his publication efforts coming at a time when “the issues of Armenia, Kurdistan, Thessaly, Macedonia, India, and Eastern Rumelia are under the attention and investigation of the whole world.”⁹³ Closely following these developments, *Muvazene* struck a pessimistic tone, reminding readers that the general state of the world could potentially result in a global conflict.⁹⁴ He saw all states as essentially rivals to one another who maintained their allies only as much as the context required it. He thought that peace-promoting countries were secretly preparing for a great war and relocating their people to relatively empty areas, planning to claim these lands as their natural inheritance in the future. According to Ali Fehmi, the key factor for warfare was money, as Napoleon once famously stated.⁹⁵

Ali Fehmi discussed Russia as an old country, noted its opposition to England, and its relations with France, and the Ottoman government, among other things.⁹⁶ Ali Fehmi’s writings suggested that the world was on the brink of conflict, and he urged readers to consider the historical context and lessons that could be learned from past events because he foresaw that a world war was impending due to the international rivalries and tensions:

In the eyes of those skilled in reasoning, Europe’s hell is deemed to be in the paradise-like Balkan Peninsula. (...) The center of the volcano is again this peninsula. This volcano is yet to make a sound. A terrifying silence, but a dreadful anticipation of what is to come. Not

93 “Hadisat-ı Siyasiye,” *Muvazene*, *Muvazene*, 6. Sayı, 24 Eylül 1313 (6 Ekim 1897), 1.

94 “Hadisat-ı Siyasiye,” *Muvazene*, 19. Sayı, 31 Kanunuevvel 1313 (12 Ocak 1898), 1.

95 “Hadisat-ı Siyasiye,” *Muvazene*, 11. Sayı, 5 Teşrinisani 1313 (17 Kasım 1897), 1.

96 “Hadisat-ı Siyasiye,” *Muvazene*, 2. Sayı, 27 Ağustos 1313 (8 Eylül 1897), 1.

only Europe, but also Asia and Africa are exposed to the developments in the Balkans.⁹⁷

In line with its mission to monitor political developments closely, Ali Fehmi covered significant global conflicts, such as the growing tensions in Crete, the British control of Cyprus, the necessity of implementing reforms in Anatolia according to the Berlin Treaty, the Thessaly question, and Bulgaria's policy of maintaining good relations with its neighbors.

In approaching political affairs, Ali Fehmi occasionally made generalizations and used the method of deduction by drawing conclusions from historical events. For instance, he posited a thesis that in world politics, the strong had historically dominated the weak, asserting that only the powerful and victorious ruled. He supported this claim by stating that powerful nations convinced others of the justifications for their actions. When providing historical examples, he noted that Napoleon easily found reasons to invade Egypt.⁹⁸ Ali Fehmi aimed to provide historical lessons and emphasized that history offers insights into the future for those who learn from the past:

Throughout history, Egyptians, Greeks, Macedonians, Romans, and Arabs achieved a level of greatness, but their empires eventually declined. They dispersed in different directions. The most determined time for a state is when it is powerful and confident to possess India or Egypt, or to achieve its ambitions. (...) The reasons for Alexander the Great's journey to India and capturing Egypt from the Hebrews (Napoleon's invasion of Egypt) were relatively easy to find. In the pre-

97 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 2. Sayı, 27 Ağustos 1313 (8 Eylül 1897), 1. "Avrupa'nın cehennemini cennet-i asa olan Balkan şiph-i ceziresinde olacağı erbab-ı muhakeme indinde müsellemdir. (...) Volkanın merkezi yine bu şiph-i ceziredir. Bu volkan henüz ses çıkarmıyor. Korkunç bir sükut lakin dehşetli bir intizar-ı ayandır. Zira bu intizar neticesine yalnız Avrupa değil, Asya, Afrika da maruzdur."

98 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 2. Sayı, 27 Ağustos 1313 (8 Eylül 1897), 1.

sent state, considering that India is under British rule and Egypt is under occupation, it is difficult to imagine anyone other than the British owning India and Egypt, even the smallest states.⁹⁹

Ali Fehmi's historic reasoning was evident when discussing the Greek-Ottoman Crete issue. He employed historical examples from ancient times to enhance his rhetoric. Although the battle in Crete had ended, tensions persisted and the matter was unresolved. Both sides were exhausted by the conflict, and ultimately the Ottoman Empire would cede Thessaly to the Greeks.¹⁰⁰ After outlining the general framework, Ali Fehmi invited readers to contemplate the Ottoman conquest of Crete during the 1500s. After discussing the roles played by Kaptan-ı Derya Yusuf Paşa and Deli Hüseyin Paşa's conquests, he noted the importance of Crete to the dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean:¹⁰¹

The island of Crete is the center of action. Letting go of this island means forgetting all the territories around the Mediterranean and any hopes related to them.¹⁰²

However, what troubled Ali Fehmi was not solely the evacuation of Thessaly or the government's military failures, but rather the fact that these events were hidden from the public.¹⁰³ The reason for this secrecy was evident, as Ali Fehmi believed. If Crete was to be given to the Greeks, why had so many Ottoman soldiers died there, and who was responsible for that?¹⁰⁴ Ali Fehmi succinctly summarized the disappointment with the statement: "What did those who shed blood in this battle gain? Graves

99 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 2. Sayı, 27 Ağustos 1313 (8 Eylül 1897), 1.

100 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 5. Sayı, 17 Eylül 1313 (29 Eylül 1897) 1.

101 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 4. Sayı, 10 Eylül 1313 (22 Eylül 1897), 1.

102 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 8. Sayı, 8 Teşrinievvel 1313 (20 Ekim 1897), 1.

103 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," 9. Sayı, 15 Teşrinievvel 1313 (27 Ekim 1897), 1.

104 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 35. Sayı, 22 Nisan 1314 (4 Mayıs 1898), 2.

in Thessaly!"¹⁰⁵ The government had delayed this disappointment by withholding the news of the evacuation, instilling false hope that the news would prove to be untrue. However, the belated disappointment eroded trust in government announcements and instilled anxiety about the possibility of untimely bad news among the public.¹⁰⁶

In another historical lesson, Ali Fehmi delved into the Ottoman conquests of Austria. After the Ottomans had taken control of Timisoara and Transylvania, they besieged Vienna. Damat Paşa, sympathetic to Austria, somehow forgot to bring the siege cannons, and Austria sought help from all over Europe. As a result, the siege attempt ended in failure for the Ottomans.¹⁰⁷ Just as Austria had fought against the Ottoman Empire during its strongest times, it was now trying to carve up the Ottoman Empire during its weakest moments. Thus, Ali Fehmi invited readers to reflect on historical anecdotes regarding both the Crete and Egypt issues, which also shaped his approach to the case of Austria.

Ali Fehmi argued that Austria's position was weaker than that of Ottoman Empire, influenced by internal uprisings. Despite recent relief from Ottoman pressure, Austria aimed to monopolize Ottoman foreign trade. It also had its eyes on Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Thessaloniki, as they were establishing relations. He added that if Jewish, Czech, Polish, and Slavic populations in Hungary were to engage in nationalist uprisings, Austria's disintegration would be swifter than that of the Ottomans.¹⁰⁸

105 Ibid. "Bu muharebede kan dökenler ne kazandı? Teselya'da mezar."

106 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 35. Sayı, 22 Nisan 1314 (4 Mayıs 1898), 2. "It is time to no longer believe in the evacuation of Crete or the return of Thessaly. We want to convey that it is time to know and learn about other matters.[Girit'in tahliyesine teselyanın iadesine artık inanmamak vakti geçmiştir. Başka şeyleri de bilmek öğrenmek zamanı gelmiş olduğunu söylemek anlatmak istiyoruz.]"

107 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 27. Sayı, 25 Şubat 1313 (9 Mart 1898), 1.

108 Ibid.

When it comes to the Macedonian question, Ali Fehmi both shared his personal opinions and provided readers with facts. He explained the concept of the Eastern Question, framed the Macedonian issue being a subset of it, and highlighted the importance of this matter to his readers:

To possess the Macedonian region would mean to dominate the Mediterranean, just as it implies accepting the independence and sovereignty of small Balkan governments, and thus submitting to the necessity of ensuring their autonomy. Therefore, as a result of the ambition they have shown, this situation will certainly relegate the Balkan governments to the periphery of Europe.¹⁰⁹

After emphasizing the importance of Macedonia, Ali Fehmi, who believed that international reforms demanded in the international arena were necessary for the continuity of Ottoman presence in these lands, advocated that the reforms to be carried out in Macedonia were, in fact, the restoration of confirmed rights through the Gülhane and the Reform edicts. Anyone with a sound mind could recognize the need for a general reform:¹¹⁰

Claiming that the reforms should only apply to Bulgarians and demanding this is unjust when justice is required (...) Moreover, the reform should not only be limited to Macedonia, but all over the Ottoman territories, everyone should be provided with the means to protect and defend their rights, property, life, and honor and to ensure their rights through humane and necessary means.¹¹¹

Ali Fehmi also criticized the aspirations of the Greeks' "great design," lamenting how they directed their focus as far as Istanbul and equated

109 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 12. Sayı, 12 Teşrinisani 1313 (24 Kasım 1897), 1.

110 Ibid.

111 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 17. Sayı, 17 Kanunuevvel 1313 (29 Aralık 1897), 1.

gaining honor with gaining land. He made a new generalization by stating, "Once the intention is there, excuses are easily found."¹¹² Yet, his commentaries on political affairs were not limited to developments in the Eastern Mediterranean. The newspaper paid due attention to the developments in the Yemen province, Russia's rapprochement with Spain due to the closeness between England and America, the American-Spanish war in the Philippines, and the protection of Chinese in the Philippines by the British.¹¹³

4.2.3 "Foreign Affairs"

The "Foreign Affairs" section, in fact, reported what was happening in the world on a global scale, balancing the newspaper's focus on local events. In so doing, *Muvazene* quoted a number of newspapers in its coverage of global developments. For instance, in the conflict between Kurds and Armenians, where it was reported that about 300 Armenians crossed the Iranian border and killed between 300 to 600 Kurds living in tents, the sources were the *Daily News*, *Tebris*, and *Tan* newspapers.¹¹⁴ In another example, the *Papa Gal* newspaper depicted Russia and England as about to clash.¹¹⁵ The *Petit Jurnal* newspaper stated that 110 million Russians would aid the French against the Germans.¹¹⁶ The *Rovada Rova* newspaper depicted that the Turks would not easily withdraw from Thessaly.¹¹⁷

The "Foreign Affairs" section also covered developments such as the clashes between Albanians and Turks in Albania, the allegation that the Ottoman Empire encouraged the revolution in India, the British sending aid to India, and the rebellion of soldiers in the Congo.¹¹⁸ The news also

112 "Hadisat-ı Siyasiye," *Muvazene*, 7. Sayı, 1 Teşrinievvel 1313 (13 Ekim 1897), 1.

113 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 17. Sayı, 17 Kanunuevvel 1313 (29 Aralık 1897), 3.

114 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 2. Sayı, 27 Ağustos 1313 (8 Eylül 1897), 3.

115 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 36. Sayı, 29 Nisan 1314 (11 Mayıs 1898), 3.

116 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 3. Sayı, 3 Eylül 1313 (15 Eylül 1897), 3.

117 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 2. Sayı, 27 Ağustos 1313 (8 Eylül 1897), 3.

118 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 4. Sayı, 10 Eylül 1313 (22 Eylül 1897), 3.

reported that a peace treaty was signed between Greece and Turkey at Tophane Palace,¹¹⁹ and that weapons of Muslims on the island of Cyprus were collected.¹²⁰

Additionally, it was reported that Istanbul Armenian Patriarch Ormanyan Efendi had stated that he could not continue his duties if necessary reforms were not implemented by the Sultan.¹²¹ Consequently, a commission was established in Tophane to address the needs of Armenian schools and churches.¹²² In another instance, one of the Young Turks was invited to Istanbul and pardoned by the Sultan as the *Kolonyi* newspaper informed.¹²³ The Young Turks had made appeals to the monasteries of major foreign powers for reforms across the Ottoman Empire, and their statements were also sent to newspapers.¹²⁴ It was possible to learn from a telegram that was sent from Istanbul that there were claims of a meeting of Young Turks at Istanbul's Eyüp Sultan Mosque.¹²⁵

In its coverage of foreign affairs, it is interesting to see that in quoting from various newspapers Ali Fehmi extensively described the relevant images and caricatures, which his newspaper was unable to reproduce otherwise. In one instance, Ali Fehmi noted that:

Yesterday's *Papa Gal* newspaper has created images in a way that invites the Christian world to unity. It depicted Greece in a weak state.¹²⁶

119 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 5. Sayı, 17 Eylül 1313 (29 Eylül 1897), 3.

120 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 7. Sayı, 1 Teşrinievvel 1313 (13 Ekim 1897), 3.

121 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 18. Sayı, 24 Kanunuevvel 1313 (5 Ocak 1898), 3.

122 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 21. Sayı, 14 Kanunusani 1313 (26 Ocak 1898), 3.

123 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 4. Sayı, 10 Eylül 1313 (22 Eylül 1897), 3.

124 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 23. Sayı, 28 Kanunusani 1313 (9 Şubat 1898), 3.

125 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 30. Sayı, 18 Mart 1314 (30 Mart 1898), 3.

126 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 4. Sayı, 10 Eylül 1313 (22 Eylül 1897), 3. "Yesterday's *Papagal* newspaper depicted the Christian world being invited to unity, portraying Greece in a weakened state. [Dün gelen *Papagal* gazetesi Hristiyan alemini ittihadı davet eder tarzında resimler yapmıştır. Yunanıstanı baygın bir halde resmetmiştir.]"

Muvazene also described at length a caricature published in the *Papa Gal* newspaper regarding the Eastern Rumelia:

Greece, while sitting on a chair, is being shaved by Germany who held a large straight razor. However, it is observed that despite Turkey's beard being lathered with soap, the great powers of Europe, holding razor, dare not shave it. The control of the Greek beard's finances is in Turkey, and Turkey's beard is in Eastern Rumelia. If the incident reported in the *Sovoboda* newspaper, which is attributed to the Turkish soldiers' actions on the Bulgaria-Turkey border, is indeed true, newspapers that do not wish for dust to be raised on the relations between the two governments express their regret.¹²⁷

The paragraphs depicting the assassination of the Greek king by French newspapers were as follows:

French newspapers are publishing pictures of Georgios Karditzi shooting his friend Kiriakos with the intention of assassinating the Greek king. The accompanying images depict their movements in caricature style.¹²⁸

Among the political images of the August 10th issue of *Rovoderevo* magazine, there was a picture that portrayed the governor of Crete as about to hatch from an egg.¹²⁹ *Muvazene* enthusiastically described the captivating caricatures found in various newspapers, including *Papa Gal*, providing detailed written descriptions to vividly capture all the details of the caricatures in readers' minds:

Papa Gal newspaper satirically depicts the world of politics. The tree you see is labeled "Balkans." Bulgaria is on top of the tree. Greece, about to climb, is represented. From this tree, Russia, represented by the rope attached to Istanbul, is moving towards Istanbul. Below the rope are Italy,

127 "Havadis-i Hariciye," *Muvazene*, 6. Sayı, 24 Eylül 1313 (6 Ekim 1897), 1.

128 "Bulgaristan Havadisı," *Muvazene*, 29. Sayı, 11 Mart 1314 (23 Mart 1898), 3.

129 "Muvazene," *Muvazene*, 51. Sayı, 12 Ağustos 1314 (24 Ağustos 1898), 4.

Austria, Germany, England, and finally, Turkey next to Istanbul. England, with the intention of preventing Russia from reaching Istanbul, holds a bayonet-equipped rifle under the rope. If Russia achieves its goal, the illustration shows these nations with their extended noses taking up this posture.¹³⁰

4.2.4 “Muvazene” is talking

Muvazene newspaper has another section named “Muvazene,” and this is not a section where news or ideas were listed. The “Muvazene” section was instead a space within which the newspaper seemed to interject and provide a natural reaction between the news, sometimes with just a sentence or two, and other times with longer passages that provided the editorial point of view. In the 7th issue, after a news item regarding irregularities in the charitable foundations, *Muvazene* makes the following suggestion:

It has been not for five but for nineteen years that accounts should be revealed one by one. A commission should be formed from individuals unrelated to the charitable foundations to expose matters. Those who currently sit in the endowment properties and lease out their surroundings, as well as those who delegate their duties to others and pocket the money, should also be revealed.¹³¹

130 “Muvazene,” *Muvazene*, 26. Sayı, 18 Şubat 1313 (2 Mart 1898), 4. “*Papagal gazetesi politika alemini istihzakarane resmetmiştir. Gördüğünüz ağaç üzerinde Balkan yazılmıştır. Ağacın üzerinde olan Bulgaristan’dır. Tırmanmak üzere bulunan yunandır. Bu ağaçtan İstanbul’a bağlı olan ip üzerinde İstanbul’a yürümek üzere hareket eden Rusya’dır. İpin altında İtalya Avusturya Almanya İngiltere nihayet İstanbul yanında Türkiye’dir. İngiltere menafii Rusya’nın İstanbul’a gitmesine mani olmak üzere elindeki süngülü tüfengi ipin altında tutmaktadır. Eğer Rusya amaline nail olur ise bu devletlerin uzamış olan burunlarıyla böyle bir vaziyet alacakları tasvir olunmuştur.*”

131 “Muvazene,” *Muvazene*, 7. Sayı, 1 Teşrinievvel 1313 (13 Ekim 1897), 2.

In another example, *Muvazene* had contented itself by saying after diplomatic news: “An even more dire matter than an epidemic is manifesting itself.”¹³² In the 38th issue, an extensive discussion on the Crete issue was carried out in “*Muvazene*.” Following a letter to the newspaper in the 39th issue, another lengthy discussion follows. In the 46th issue, in line with the topic, “*Muvazene*” recites the proverb “When you find a horse you cannot find a maidan, when you find a maidan you cannot find a horse” and he recites the poem “those who race gently reach the aimed destination, those who rush trip and fall.”¹³³

§ 4.3 Letters from the Readers

In line with its mission statement, *Muvazene* had established a close dialogue with its readers. Some were sending letters to congratulate the newspaper, others to share the news they had heard, some in the hope of having their opinions published, and some to add corrections or amendments to the news they had read in *Muvazene*. While Ali Fehmi often acknowledged the receipt of these letters, only the ones he deemed essential were published. For example, Hacı İsmail Beyzade Hakkı Bey from the Filibe municipal assembly wrote a letter to *Muvazene*, angrily denying a news item about him in the Ottoman government-supporting *Gayret* newspaper.¹³⁴ Hakkı Bey claimed that the *Gayret* newspaper had unjustly criticized the administration and thus was entitled to respond. *Muvazene* granted him the right to respond, publishing his letter in its entirety.

From this letter, it can be understood that due to conditions in the Yeniköy region, it was necessary to relocate people from one place to another. To achieve this goal, the Filibe municipality formed a commission and announced its decision on September 18. However, Hakkı Bey objected, stating that this protocol did not adhere to the requirements of

132 “*Muvazene*,” *Muvazene*, 32. Sayı, 1 Nisan 1314 (13 Nisan 1898), 3.

133 “*Muvazene*,” *Muvazene*, 46. Sayı, 8 Temmuz 1314 (20 Temmuz 1898), 2.

134 “Arz-ı Hakikat,” *Muvazene*, 10. Sayı, 22 Teşrinievvel 1313 (3 Kasım 1897), 3.

Islamic law and, therefore, could not be implemented. Hakkı Bey's objection was accepted, but this time the *Gayret* newspaper published a piece that implied Hakkı Bey was dissatisfied with this rejection decision. This created an impression that Hakkı Bey did not respect Islamic sensitivities.

When Hakkı Bey brought his complaint against the *Gayret* newspaper to *Muvazene*, he essentially confirmed once again that *Gayret* and *Muvazene* were ideologically rivals. Indeed, *Muvazene*'s response to *Gayret* was quite remarkable in its own right:

Dear *Gayret* supporters! Have you realized which path the truth is on? Dear Muslims! Take a lesson from such matters. Choose young citizens who have not been tainted by the nonsensical ambitions of certain opportunistic politicians who claim, 'I will be the chosen one.' Choose those who will protect and defend what is right and just.¹³⁵

Another letter came from a person named Şevket from the town of Balçık. The town's muezzin Süleyman Faik Efendi and the people of Balçık had established a secondary school after observing the progress of non-Muslim communities in education with "envy." After the appointed teachers had provided education for a certain period, Şevket, astonished by the responses of the children, wrote a letter to praise elementary school teacher Osman Sırrı Efendi from Pazarcık and his brother, Hasan Hilmi Efendi, who was the middle school teacher.¹³⁶

135 Ibid. "Ey Gayretçiler! Hakikat hangi yolda bulunduğunu anladınız mı? Ey Müslümanlar işte bu gibi şeylerden ibret alarak intihap zamanları ben olacağım diyerek ortaya atılan, meydana çıkan birtakım şuuruna halel gelmiş ikbal-perest siyaset matuflarının sayıklamasına kapılmayarak hukuksuzu müdafaa ve muhafaza edecek miktar lisan şinas genç vatandaşlarımızı intihap ediniz."

136 "Filibe'de Muvazene Gazetesi'ne," *Muvazene*, 29. Sayı, 11 Mart 1314 (23 Mart 1898), 2.

§ 4.4 Articles of Osman Nuri from Tarnovo: “A Few Words About Our National Education”

Ali Fehmi's brother-in-law, Osman Nuri Efendi, wrote three articles titled “A Few Words about Our National Education” in the first year of *Muvazene*'s publication, all of which were related to pedagogy. In fact, the initial ideas for the teachers' association that would be established in the future, initially known as “Muslim Teachers' Association” and later as “Turkish Teachers' Union,” can be found in the three articles written by Osman Nuri in *Muvazene*'s first year. While sources often mention that Ali Fehmi was the first to propose the idea of the Turkish Teachers' Union, it can be said that it was Osman Nuri who articulated this idea in *Muvazene* for the very first time.

Osman Nuri's article in the 27th issue emphasized that by the standards of the twentieth century a nation's progress required advancements not only in military, but also in education. Unfortunately, he observed that the education of Bulgarian Muslims and the general “population” was lagging far behind. He noted that there was a lack of pedagogical awareness in elementary schools, with different age groups even being mixed, and he complained that there was no comprehensive curriculum in secondary schools.

Osman Nuri presented his ideas on which subjects should be taught to which age groups and to what extent. He argued that teaching Arabic and Persian in all their details to students who could not even form a sentence in their own language was unnecessary. He acknowledged that Arabic and Persian were not enemies, as they contributed to Ottoman Turkish, but he used the example of Latin in European schools to show that not all the rules of the languages' origins were taught extensively even in Europe.¹³⁷

In his second article, published in the 28th issue, Osman Nuri criticized the lack of systematic teaching of science courses in secondary

137 “Maarif-i Milliyemize Dair Bir İki Söz,” *Muvazene*, 27. Sayı, 25 Şubat 1313 (9 Mart 1898), 2.

schools.¹³⁸ He condemned rote learning, stating that knowledge forced upon students without sparking their interest would be of no use. He stressed that schools and the education system needed urgent reform and that both families and schools had to put in serious effort for the future strength of the new generation. He argued that children should be guided based on their tendencies, and all of these efforts were not just for the sake of children, but for the good of the entire nation.¹³⁹

In his third article, published in the 29th issue, Osman Nuri proposed the formation of an educational and teachers' association. He believed that individual efforts in the teaching profession were futile and that talents were being wasted. He suggested that if teachers united and formed associations, many difficulties could be overcome.¹⁴⁰ He was aware that some might interpret his ideas negatively and misconstrue his intentions as opposition to the government. However, he made it clear that he had no ill intentions and hoped that the government would not misinterpret his proposal:

Let us not allow the scholar, accustomed to giving negative meanings to everything, to view this idea of ours as harmful to national interests. Even the teachers among our Bulgarian citizens, though everything is perfect, have long seen the need for unity and cooperation to work together. In our case, we have neither a comprehensive program nor a need for consultation and seeking help from each other. At that time, we could ask for many things from the local government, and they would be provided without any shortcomings.¹⁴¹

138 "Maarif-i Milliyemize Dair Bir İki Söz," *Muvazene*, 28. Sayı, 4 Mart 1314 (16 Mart 1898), 2.

139 Ibid.

140 "Maarif-i Milliyemize Dair Bir İki Söz," *Muvazene*, 29. Sayı, 11 Mart 1314 (23 Mart 1898), 2.

141 "Maarif-i Milliyemize Dair Bir İki Söz," *Muvazene*, 28. Sayı, 4 Mart 1314 (16 Mart 1898), 2.

Osman Nuri, hopeful that the municipality would respond to the demands of Muslims in the field of education, implied that being an ethnic Bulgarian is not a requirement to be a Bulgarian citizen.¹⁴² The speech given by a secondary school teacher was an evidence of the assistance provided by the Bulgarian administration.¹⁴³ He wrote as if he were aware that education is was fundamental right of citizenship and hoped that his vision would be useful someday in the future.

§ 4.5 Ali Fehmi's Articles and His Ideas in *Muvazene*

Ali Fehmi's *Muvazene* newspaper had become a platform where his inquisitive, combative, and investigative personality intersected with a solution-oriented perspective. He repeatedly emphasized the dire situation of Muslims in Bulgaria. The newspaper's appeal was enhanced by its focus on topics such as Muslim schools and endowments, diligent tracking of issues concerning everyone, responsiveness to global events, including not only Ali Fehmi's opinions, but also those of various other people.

Furthermore, Ali Fehmi expressed his own ideas through articles and opinion pieces. His first article in *Muvazene*, which was aligned with the newspaper's purpose, was titled "Our Schools." Ali Fehmi's motivation for writing this article stemmed from the absence of a Turkish-speaking teacher who could teach Bulgarian in the secondary school of Filibe (*Filibe Rüşdiyesi*). Although the Filibe school provided better education compared to other secondary schools, the lack of a Bulgarian language teacher made Ali Fehmi ponder and even lament the situation of other secondary schools.

142 Ibid.

143 "Rüşdiye muallim-i evveli Mehmet Hilmi tarafından okunan nutuk sureti," *Muvazene*, 33. Sayı, 8 Nisan 1314 (20 Nisan 1898), 2. "We see that the local government never hesitates to provide assistance for all the means and resources that will ensure the welfare and happiness of the Islamic community. [Görüyoruz ki hükümet-i mahalliye millet-i islamiyenin refah ve saadetini temin edecek her türlü esbab ve vesalini istikmali için muavenetten hiçbir vakit geri durmuyor.]"

In this article, Ali Fehmi provided basic information about Filibe schools and criticized the state of Muslim schools in Bulgaria. While he noted that the children attending the four elementary schools (*sıbyan mektepleri*) in Filibe were bright and promising, he regretfully stated that the girls' secondary school in Filibe (*Filibe Kız Rüşdiyesi*) and boys' secondary school (*erkek rüşdiyesi*) were significantly behind secondary schools in Istanbul (*İstanbul rüşdiyeleri*) in terms of the quality of education. Teachers were not only insufficient, but their numbers were also declining. Ali Fehmi exclaimed in dismay, "We are lagging behind the Greeks, Bulgarians, Jews, and Armenians in education (...) It's a shame, a great shame."¹⁴⁴ He complained about the lack of qualified individuals and the fact that funds were allocated abroad to people who were not qualified:

We will shout and call as much as our voice can reach. Certainly, there will be those who will come to our aid.¹⁴⁵

It is evident that this article has caused an uproar in Filibe, given that Ali Fehmi revisited this topic in another article in the 9th issue. Starting his words with "Nothing can be achieved with the words of inshallah, ma-shallah (god willing! wonderful!)," Ali Fehmi asserted that teachers should not concern themselves trying to be knowledgeable or virtuous in other matters; he emphasized that a teacher should be competent only in the subject they taught.¹⁴⁶ In an atmosphere where even efforts to determine the standards of schools were absent, and where suspicions regarding endowment funds existed, and it is claimed that the money intended for schools had not arrived, adopting this aggressive tone is quite understandable:

Previously, there were hostels for boarding students, where orphaned and destitute village children would eat, sleep, read, and write. What

144 "Mekteblerimiz," *Muvazene*, 1. Sayı, 20 Ağustos 1313 (1 Eylül 1897), 2. ["*Tahsilde rumlardan, Bulgarlardan, Yahudilerden ve Ermenilerden bile geriyiz (...) yazık çok yazık.*"]

145 "Mekteblerimiz," *Muvazene*, 4. Sayı, 10 Eylül 1313 (22 Eylül 1897), 2.

146 "Mekteblerimiz," *Muvazene*, 9. Sayı, 15 Teşrinievvel 1313 (27 Ekim 1897), 2.

happened to these hostels? Furthermore, the government provides 12,000 francs per year, and it is claimed that the funds obtained from the sold endowments had become a source of excess and mismanagement. Whether the income of the schools has increased or it is the earnings of certain wrongdoers is not clear. Is it a sin to ask these questions, or is it a transgression to raise voices to bring these sins to light?¹⁴⁷

In the 10th issue, in his article "Community and Education" Ali Fehmi referred to how 300 years ago, even in the smallest villages of the Ottoman Empire, Islamic schools (medreses) were widespread, and teachers' salaries were sufficient.¹⁴⁸ He attributed the disappearance of these medreses and the lack of well-educated teachers to the prevalence of favoritism.¹⁴⁹ He criticized that although reforms were introduced in line with European methods, these were only superficial changes. In the end, even if large sums of money were accumulated for future generations, if uneducated and morally deprived generations misuse these funds, the nation would see no benefit. According to Ali Fehmi, the only solution was to eliminate favoritism.¹⁵⁰

Ali Fehmi's observations regarding the state of Bulgarian Muslims also highlighted that the general populace was not in a promising condition. Due to the miserable situation of Muslims in Bulgaria, many were selling their lands for very little returns, and spending almost all their money to migrate to Turkey. However, they often could not settle in the first place they went and ended up moving elsewhere. As a result, these people were not only separated from their families and communities, but were also causing Bulgaria to lose a potentially valuable population. Ali Fehmi suggested that regardless of the degree of freedom given to Turkish Muslim minorities in Bulgaria, if investments and reforms were not

147 Ibid.

148 "Umum ve Maarif," *Muvazene*, 22 Teşrinievvel 1313, 1.

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid.

made in schools, the Muslim population would continue to live under dire circumstances.¹⁵¹ He believed that the key was to eliminate favoritism:

The Bulgarian government has already attempted to hinder the migration of Turks. In short, even though military service is generally obligatory, it is made easier for Muslims, with the military fee being accepted in installments. Despite these efforts, people still choose to migrate.¹⁵²

Ali Fehmi strongly emphasized that regardless of the degree of freedom given to Turkish and Muslim minorities under Bulgarian rule, unless investments and reforms were made in schools, the Muslim population would always live under unfavorable conditions. This was Ali Fehmi's fundamental concern. For instance, when the Ottoman government reduced the allocated budget for schools in Bulgaria, Ali Fehmi questioned why this budget was being cut and criticized the allocation of more funds to administrative committees. The decrease in teacher salaries left them unable to continue in their profession, leading to many leaving their jobs.¹⁵³ Ali Fehmi criticized this decision of the Ottoman Parliament (Meclis-i Mebusan) in his article titled "Mistake or Virtue."¹⁵⁴

However, it was a fact that the endowments issue was also in need of reform in Bulgaria, just as much as the schools, and every problem related to administration was closely connected. Recognizing this, Ali Fehmi wrote intense criticisms about endowments in *Muvazene*. He proposed that endowments should be managed collectively and openly for

151 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 14. Sayı, 26 Teşrinisani 1313 (8 Aralık 1897), 2.

152 Ibid.

153 "Ulum ve Maarif," *Muvazene*, 18. Sayı, 24 Kanunuevvel 1313 (5 Ocak 1898), 1. "Other nations shamelessly give their servants and gatekeepers a hundred lira instead of the 100 kuruş we give to our teachers. [Başka milletler bizim utanmayarak muallimlere verdiğimiz 100 kuruş yerine hizmetçilerine, kapıcılarına yüzlük veriyor.]"

154 Ibid.

everyone, suggesting that this approach would prevent abuse.¹⁵⁵ He believed that by preventing misuse of endowment funds, the remaining money could be utilized to invest in schools:

The establishment and management of all types of endowments and rentals should be conducted through an official administrative department, with transparency and public auction methods for all transactions, ensuring that the collected rents are not postponed. This involves subjecting the guarantors to joint liability, meaning that unpaid rents would be collected from those who acted as guarantors or those who provided valid guarantees. We are of the firm belief that this is in accordance with sound reasoning.¹⁵⁶

In another article regarding the endowments, Ali Fehmi mentioned that many individuals holding official titles received monthly salaries but failed to provide any public service, diminishing the endowment's revenue. As the endowment's income was insufficient to cover the salaries, properties such as houses, shops, mosques, and tombs, which were endowment assets, began to be sold. This initiated a cycle, whereby diminishing assets led to even further decreased revenue. This situation was not unique to Bulgaria; Russia and Austria had also started seeking solutions, involving endowment inspectors and commissioners in these

155 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 18. Sayı, 24 Kanunuevvel 1313 (5 Ocak 1898), 2. *"In order to put an end to all forms of abuse and bring an end to any form of wrongdoing, it is absolutely necessary to ensure the centralized administration of all waqfs. If personal interests or biases are taken into consideration, it is widely acknowledged that detrimental outcomes will result for those who have vested interests in this matter. [Her türlü sui istimalata, her şekilde kıl-ü kale nihayet vermek üzere umum evkaf'ın ancemaatin idare olunmasına katiyen karar verilmelidir. Bu babda hatır veyahut taraf gözetilecek olduğu takdirde bu hususta menfaatler olanlar için fena neticeler intaç edeceğini kimse inkar etmiyor.]"*

156 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 18. Sayı, 24 Kanunuevvel 1313 (5 Ocak 1898), 2.

countries. According to Ali Fehmi, if endowment revenues were increased, the surplus funds could be allocated to schools and teachers' salaries, thereby beginning to address educational issues.

Ali Fehmi argued that there was an excess of personnel in the endowment management, and these surplus individuals needed to resign.¹⁵⁷ Over time, endowment properties were being sold off to individuals like Mehmet Çavuş, Raşit Efendi, Sirac Mustafa, Yakup Ağa, and Ahmet Usta. These properties were then rented out, often as “boza vendors or carpenters.” These names were openly mentioned in *Muvazene*. In fact, after criticisms of the Silistre endowment, it is mentioned that Hacı Yahya Efendi had taken the matter to court, as reported in *Muvazene*.¹⁵⁸ Ali Fehmi was infuriated by the sluggish attitudes of endowment officials when some endowment properties were being demolished due to urban planning.¹⁵⁹ He questioned what the endowment officials were up to, while the red lines of urban plans crossed over endowment property. He asked what answers they would give if people who had had left charitable foundations behind were to rise from their graves and demand accountability. He continued:

Do you know how many thousand liras these salaries were given as payments per year to commissioners, secretaries, muftis, and deputies on behalf of the endowments? Not seeing these while locusts devour the endowments and being unable to find a solution are excuses for labeling the position as a ‘frightening title.’ Woe to the Islamic nation.

157 “İcmal-i Evkaf,” *Muvazene*, 28. Sayı, 4 Mart 1314 (16 Mart 1898), 1.

158 “Bulgaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 31. Sayı, 25 Mart 1314 (6 Nisan 1898), 3.

159 “Bugaristan Havadisi,” *Muvazene*, 52. Sayı, 19 Ağustos 1314 (31 Ağustos 1898), 2. “*Their negligence or laziness has gone beyond limits. If it were only limited to this, it would be fine. Let's control our tongues and restrain what the pen writes. However, the mosque has been approached from another aspect as well. It will eventually collapse completely, so aren't we justified in writing a few lines about it? [Bunların işi yahut uyuşukluğu başlarından aşmış. Bu kadarla kalsa iyi. Dilimizi tutalım kalemin yazdığını çizelim. Lakin cami diğer cihetten de plana getirilmiş. Bir zaman büsbütün yıkılacaktır o halde bir kaç satır yazı yazmakta mazur değil miyiz?]*”

Shame on those who feast on endowment funds without doing any work!¹⁶⁰

While Ali Fehmi complained about these issues, the problem of the Buhari-i Şerif Mosque had once again emerged. Ali Fehmi claimed that those appointed to manage the Buhari-i Şerif endowment had always had other motives such as embezzling funds from the endowment shops rather than providing education at the Buhari-i Şerif.¹⁶¹ At another time, there was news that endowment funds were being stored in a merchant's safe. For Ali Fehmi, the fact that the endowments did not even have their own safe was a subject of ridicule. In the end, the endowment was owed 48,000 francs, and to collect this debt, a lawyer had to be hired, with the community covering the lawyer's fee of 7,000 francs. In another example, the shops of the Buhari-i Şerif Mosque were prevented from using funds of the endowment, but these shops were again at risk. While in the initial issues of *Muvazene* Ali Fehmi mentioned that the person responsible for teaching at the Buhari-i Şerif Mosque did not fulfill his duty, in issue 52, he noted that someone named Şükrü Hoca had been appointed to this role in response to the lack of responsibility in the mosque.¹⁶²

The aggressive behavior of endowment officials also caught attention. For instance, the endowment director who invited the painter to paint the Seyyid Mahmud Mosque had slapped him, saying, "You have spoken ill of the state and the nation in someone's coffeehouse."¹⁶³ Ali Fehmi reported that efforts were made to prevent the matter from going to court.

160 "Bugaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 52. Sayı, 19 Ağustos 1314 (31 Ağustos 1898), 2. "[Ev-kafı çekirgeler çatır çatır yer iken bunları görmemek çaresini bulamamak komiserliğe korkuluk namını vermeye vesile gösterir. Millet-i İslamiyeye yazık. İş yapmayarak vakıftan bad-ı heva para yiyenlere ayıb!]"

161 Ibid.

162 "Bugaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 52. Sayı, 19 Ağustos 1314 (31 Ağustos 1898), 2.

163 "Mektep," *Muvazene*, 38. Sayı, 13 Mayıs 1314, (25 Mayıs 1898), 3. "You have spoken ill of the state and the people in somebody's coffeehouse. [Sen filanın kahvesinde devlet millet hakkında itale-i lisanda bulunmuşsun.]"

Ali Fehmi did not refrain from criticizing the Bulgarian Commissioner for Endowments, accusing him of filling the endowments with his cronies. He invited him to work more seriously.¹⁶⁴ Ali Fehmi found it illogical for the journalist Abdullah Efendi, who lived in Filibe, to be appointed in the endowment, arguing that if he would not be involved in endowment matters, there would be no need for a Bulgarian Commissioner.¹⁶⁵

In the end, the endowments were the sole property left for the Muslims of Bulgaria in those lands, and when the possibility of losing them emerged, everyone contributed economically. Funds were collected for Muslim schools, and when necessary, teachers' salaries were paid by families. In a region where Ottoman rule had disappeared, the only common property of Muslims striving to protect their lives was the schools and endowment properties. These communal assets contributed to the formation of the Muslim nation's identity within the borders of Bulgaria. Therefore, Ali Fehmi's criticisms of endowment mismanagement were substantial. He advocated for the efficient and effective use of money and fiercely criticized those who abused their positions.

The Muslim population remaining in Bulgaria was no longer Ottoman subjects but rather Bulgarian subjects. Therefore, they were striving to protect their national identities within the framework of the rights offered by Bulgaria's citizenship. Although intellectuals were actively engaged in this endeavor, when we look at the assistance provided to endowments and schools, it becomes evident that the public also harbored national concerns. As depicted by Ali Fehmi, it was not the Muslim population but rather the endowment officials and appointees chosen out of personal favor who exhibited complacency and endangered the lives of the people.

164 "Bugaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 39. Sayı, 21 Mayıs 1314 (2 Haziran 1898), 2.

165 "Bugaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 52. Sayı, 19 Ağustos 1314 (31 Ağustos 1898), 2.

§ 4.6 Engagement with the Readers

Open letters frequently appeared on the pages of *Muvazene*, enabling the most sincere and direct dialogue between readers and the newspaper. In one instance, where Nasuhi Bey the Ottoman Commissioner to Bulgaria had invited Ali Fehmi to his presence in an attempt to shut down *Muvazene*, Ali Fehmi responded through an open letter:

To the respected Nasuhi Bey Efendi

We appreciate the compliments to our states (...) We were not hypocrites. We are not. We will not be. It is not possible to close down *Muvazene* with our own consent. We are capable of defending our rights secured by the law.¹⁶⁶

The “Open Letters” section became a platform for Ali Fehmi to engage with the newspapers’ readership in a number of ways. In one instance, *Muvazene* reported receiving the article of İsmail Beyzade Hakkı Bey, which refuted a piece of news from the *Gayret* newspaper.¹⁶⁷ Thanks were conveyed for the compliments of Raif Ağazade Muhammed Hulusi Efendi.¹⁶⁸ A message was written to Osman Nuri: “To A. N, your third article has arrived; when the Russians finally arrive in front of Istanbul, it will be published.”¹⁶⁹ The General Secretary of Islamic Education Councils was asked for various information about schools, such as the number of students, ongoing student count, ages, teacher numbers, salaries, and

166 “Açık Mektublar,” *Muvazene*, 4. Sayı, 10 Eylül 1313 (22 Eylül 1897), 4. “Atufetli Nasuhi Bey Efendi Hazretlerine; İltifatı devletlerimize arz-ı teşekkür ederiz (...) Münafık değil idik. Değiliz. Olmayacağız. Muvazene’yi kendi rızamızla kapamak mümkün değildir. Kanunun temin ettiği hukukumuzu müdafaaya muktediriz.”

167 “Açık Mektublar,” *Muvazene*, 10. Sayı, 22 Teşrinievvel 1313 (3 Kasım 1897), 4.

168 “Açık Mektublar,” 9. Sayı, 15 Teşrinievvel 1313 (27 Ekim 1897), 4.

169 Ibid.

curriculum, for publication in the newspaper.¹⁷⁰ Thanks were given collectively to individuals who sent telegrams and letters for the holiday greetings in issue 26.¹⁷¹ A letter from Berlin was received by *Muvazene*.¹⁷²

In subsequent issues, *Muvazene* started to receive notifications; for instance, in issue 6, it was reported that 1989 francs were lost from the endowments. Likewise, in the same issue, it was reported that the 2,500 francs given by the government were entirely stolen.¹⁷³ In issue 28, congratulations were extended to Halis Eşref Bey, a law graduate, for translating and bringing a copy of the book *Bulgarian Penal Code* to the *Muvazene* headquarters; everyone was advised to acquire the book.¹⁷⁴ Thanks were given to Raif Boşnakof Ebu'l-Basri Efendi for his kind words, but it was stated that the compliments could not be published in the newspaper since they were directed at Ali Fehmi.¹⁷⁵ A letter was written to someone who wrote about the Şumnu endowments, but since the person did not provide their name, it was stated that the letter would not be published.¹⁷⁶ It was mentioned that a letter had arrived regarding a lottery for educational funds and that readers were expected to provide details and information about the incident.¹⁷⁷ Thanks were also conveyed to *Tercüman* newspaper.¹⁷⁸

Such examples that often appeared in passing on the pages of *Muvazene* are indicative of active communication between the newspaper and

170 "Açık Mektublar," *Muvazene*, 17. Sayı, 17 Kanunuevvel 1313 (29 Aralık 1897), 4. "Since our newspaper's main foundation is based on education and serving schools, if there is no involvement in educational and pedagogical services, it is necessary to support the principle of progress. Therefore, we are in need of information and mutual assistance regarding our schools. [Gazetemizin asıl tesisi maarif ve mekatibe hizmet hiç olmaz ise terakkileri hususuna tevassut etmek esasına müstenid olduğundan mekteblerimiz hakkında malumat ve muavenet-i müteakabileye ihtiyacımız derkârdır.]"

171 "Açık Mektublar," *Muvazene*, 26. Sayı, 18 Şubat 1313 (2 Mart 1898), 4.

172 "Açık Mektublar," *Muvazene*, 38. Sayı, 13 Mayıs 1314, (25 Mayıs 1898), 4.

173 "Açık Mektublar," *Muvazene*, 6. Sayı, 24 Eylül 1313 (6 Ekim 1897), 4.

174 "Açık Mektublar," *Muvazene*, 28. Sayı, 4 Mart 1314 (16 Mart 1898), 4.

175 "Açık Mektublar," *Muvazene*, 37. Sayı, 6 Mayıs 1314 (18 Mayıs 1897), 4.

176 Ibid.

177 "Açık Mektuplar," *Muvazene*, 39. Sayı, 21 Mayıs 1314 (2 Haziran 1898), 4.

178 "Açık Mektublar," *Muvazene*, 28. Sayı, 4 Mart 1314 (16 Mart 1898), 4.

its readership. The newspaper became not only a product presented for public consumption, but also a platform of social interaction that was actively used and developed. Notifications from readers were evaluated, and when new comments or reactions came in, they were considered for publication. *Muvazene*, being dedicated entirely to the service of Bulgarian Muslims, only excluded the news that did not serve the public's interest. Apart from that, it is evident that Ali Fehmi evaluated any kind of news that would contribute to progress.

The list of subscribers to *Muvazene* reflected the newspaper's success in engaging the Muslim community in Bulgaria. The newspaper enjoyed a wide readership. Among the subscribers were the management committee of the Turkish National Coffeehouse (Milli Türk Kırathanesi), the management committee of *Hablü'l-Metin* newspaper, Reşadiye Coffeehouse, Coffeehouse Owner Yusuf Hacı Süleyman Efendi, Coffeehouse Owner Salim Efendi, Barber Ahmet Kalfa at Tabakhane Bazaar, Clockmaker Hacı Sabri Efendizade Hüseyin Efendi, Engineer Talat Bey and Soapmaker Mahmud Ağazade Mehmet Efendi.

Ali Fehmi's attempts to create a vibrant community of readers around the newspaper also included the organization of competitions for students. In three separate occasions, he organized three question-and-answer competitions for students to test the success of certain schools in teaching, while acknowledging students that excelled. The winner would receive a six-month subscription, the runner-up a three-month subscription, and the third-place student would receive a one-month free subscription.¹⁷⁹ The question posed to the students was, "What method should one adopt to learn the lessons taught at school?"¹⁸⁰ Some students provided lengthy answers to this question. Although Ali Fehmi expected to receive good answers from the schools in Filibe, he believed that the relationship between spies and teachers prevented such an engagement with the newspaper. Ali Fehmi had high expectations from the schools in Pazarcık as well, but he noted that suitable answers had come neither

179 "Sual," *Muvazene*, 11. Sayı, 5 Teşrinisani 1313 (17 Kasım 1897), 4.

180 "Sual," *Muvazene*, 12. Sayı, 12 Teşrinisani 1313 (24 Kasım 1897), 2.

from Filibe, nor Pazarcık. The school that responded on time was the Şumnu secondary school. Salim Ağazade İsmail Hafız Efendi, a fourth-grade student at secondary school in Şumnu, came in first place. The second-place student was again Osman Nuri Efendi, a fourth-grade student from the same school.¹⁸¹ Even though the response of Osman Nuri Efendi noted how the student actively asked his teacher about parts of the lesson he did not understand, Ali Fehmi publicly criticized parts of Osman Nuri's answer, making it clear that Ali Fehmi was sharply against rote learning.¹⁸² Ali Fehmi, through this question-answer competition, was striving to emphasize the importance of a new approach to education.

In issue 25, the question posed to the students was: "What is history? What is its benefit? How many parts and periods is it divided into? Is the main reason for the rise of the new era the conquest of Istanbul?"¹⁸³ The most successful answers were provided by İsmail Hafız Efendi and Osman Nuri Efendi, both fourth-grade students from the secondary school in Şumnu; Mustafa Ağazade Hafız İsmail Efendi, a fourth-grade student from the secondary school in Yenicuma; and Ahmed Zeki Efendi, a second-grade student from the secondary school in Plevne.¹⁸⁴ Individuals such as Hüsnü Efendi, Murat Efendi, Recep Efendi, Nureddin Efendi, Ali Efendi, and Mehmet Efendi provided explanations other than answers to the question. These individuals had become targets of Ali Fehmi's criticism for not expressing their own opinions but rather memorizing from the book—another opportunity for Ali Fehmi to criticize rote learning.¹⁸⁵

As the secondary school exams were approaching, *Muvazene* newspaper posed another question in the 43rd issue, assuming that students

181 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, *Muvazene*, 6. Sayı, 24 Eylül 1313 (6 Ekim 1897), 2.

182 Ibid.

183 "Sual," *Muvazene*, 25. Sayı, 11 Şubat 1313 (23 Şubat 1898) 2. "[Tarih neye derler, faidesi nedir, kaç kısma, kaç kuruna münkasımdır, kurun-u cedideyi küşad eden asıl sebep istanbul'un fethi midir?]"

184 "Bulgaristan Havadisi," *Muvazene*, 30. Sayı, 18 Mart 1314 (30 Mart 1898), 2.

185 Ibid.

were already prepared. The question was: "What are the types of government forms, what distinguishes them from each other, what forms of government do Turkey and Bulgaria have, is there a difference between Turkey's current administration and the administration at the time of its foundation, and which is the best form of government?"¹⁸⁶ The extensive answer written by Bıyıklıoğlu Ali Ağazade Hafız Ahmed to this question was published verbatim in the 46th issue.¹⁸⁷ Hafız Ahmed categorized the forms of government as republic, constitutional monarchy, and absolute monarchy. He provided examples of France and Switzerland for republican governance and Russia and the Ottoman Empire as examples of absolute monarchy. He emphasized that in absolute monarchy, the ruler could do whatever they wanted without being bound by laws. He attributed the ruler's decision to consult the parliament before making a decision to humanity and intelligence. Hafız Ahmed stated that he consulted his teachers and conducted thorough research before concluding that constitutional monarchy was the most reasonable form of government, arguing that a government with "justice, equality, and freedom" would always progress:

According to my humble opinion and the inferences I have drawn from the questions and answers of the instructors, I find the constitutional monarchy to be the best among them. Because if the absolute ruler of an absolute monarchy does not possess good morals and does not have information about the state's affairs, that government would be prone to disaster. Since to some extent, the constitutional monarchy government would also have a connection to this principle, in my view, the best government is the constitutional monarchy. Because the people can even elect their governing body.¹⁸⁸

186 "Sual" *Muvazene*, 43. Sayı, 17 Haziran 1314 (29 Haziran 1898), 2.

187 "Coğrafya Sualine Cevab," *Muvazene*, 46. Sayı, 8 Temmuz 1314 (20 Temmuz 1898), 2.

188 Ibid. "Fikr-i acizanemce ve muallimin-i sual ve cevablarından hasıl etdiğim muhakeme neticesi olarak hükümet-i meşrutayı hepsinden güzel buluyorum. Çünkü hükümet-i mutlakada hükümdar olan zat ahlak-ı hasene sahibi olmayub da umur-u devlete agah

According to Hafız Ahmed, due to its successes in governance since its establishment, the Ottoman State had grown to the point where it could be characterized as “Great State.” Hafız Ahmed, who believed that the laws were good in the current state, expressed his astonishment that the state did not adhere to the laws and engaged in arbitrary actions.¹⁸⁹

Overall, Ali Fehmi remained loyal to the promises he made to the readers throughout its first year examined in this chapter. It was sensitive to almost every issue related to Bulgaria’s Muslims and provided assessments on these matters while sometimes leaving them to the readers’ appreciation. It responded to letters sent by readers, creating a sense of sincere communication with them. The question-and-answer competitions organized for students, the publication of reports coming from Muslims, and the occasional humorous anecdote shared in response to the request were all examples of this genuine communication.

While taking advantage of the opportunities in Filibe, Ali Fehmi collected, evaluated, analyzed, and presented sufficient data to his readers. Throughout the year, he used more than 60 newspapers as sources while also investigating the accuracy of public reports and sharing verified information with his readers. Through *Muvazene*, he not only informed Muslims of Bulgaria about events taking place in the country, the empire, and the world but also published various opinion articles, aiming to enrich Muslims’ knowledge. He encouraged his readers to think and research believing that progress could only be achieved through hard work, seeking for information and critical thinking. It is evident that Ali Fehmi maintained this approach throughout the course of its first year of journalism.

Although *Muvazene* newspaper did not overtly engage in Young Turk propaganda during its first year, it played a significant role in the local adoption of some Young Turk ideas. This becomes evident not only from

almazsa o zaman bulunduğu hükümet felakete giriftar olur. Bu esasın bir dereceye kadar hükümet-i meşrutiyeye de teması olacağından bendenizce en güzel beğendiğim hükümet hükümet-i meşrutadır. Çünkü ahali heyet-i idareyi bile bile intihab edebilir.”

189 Ibid.

Ali Fehmi's detailed biography but also from the content of *Muvazene*. While not explicitly stated, *Muvazene* subtly conveyed the notion that the constitutional monarchy was a reasonable system. In addition, the newspaper criticized spy network harshly. Moreover, Ali Fehmi himself was being chased by spies. Additionally, Ali Fehmi held contempt towards individuals who gained rank or money from the government as a result of their complicity with censorship rules.¹⁹⁰ In the subsequent years, Ali Fehmi would make even stronger criticisms and target the Ottoman regime more openly.¹⁹¹

190 Methodieva, *Between Empire and Nation*, 106.

191 Ibid, 109.

Conclusion

This study has reconstructed the biography of Ali Fehmi, a Young Turk from Bulgaria, and discussed his intellectual activities by focusing on *Muvazene*, the newspaper he published from 1898 to 1905. The establishment of the Principality of Bulgaria after the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War brought about a new order to which the Muslims in Bulgaria had to adapt. The Balkan peoples who were former subjects of the Ottoman Empire had become citizens of the newly emerged Principality of Bulgaria. In this historical context, the Balkan Muslims sought to redefine the future of their community, and the Muslim intellectuals in particular believed that they could achieve a rejuvenation through culture and politics. Ali Fehmi was not only one of the first witnesses of this process, but also an active participant who contributed to achieving these goals.

Studying Ali Fehmi's biography shed light on the ways in which Bulgarian Muslims adapted themselves to the new political realities. His biography has also made it evident that, despite his denial, Ali Fehmi was actually a Young Turk, and the *Muvazene* newspaper, despite his claims, was aligned with the Young Turk activities. However, situating Ali Fehmi within the context of the Young Turk ideology requires a careful consideration. Despite freely expressing criticisms and thoughts which created unease among Ottoman authorities, Ali Fehmi's goal in journalism during

this period of freedom was not to impose the Young Turk ideology. Given the difficulties in attributing strict definitions and identities to Young Turks in the late nineteenth century, it is necessary to carefully examine Ali Fehmi and refrain from trying to categorize him. It is noteworthy that many figures like him were not initially seen as a member of the Young Turks. Especially in Bulgaria and generally in the Balkans, the sensitivity of intellectuals like Ali Fehmi to the common problems and corruption that the local Muslims had to deal with neither provides sufficient evidence to attribute any single identity to them, nor enables researchers to determine when or where such intellectuals exactly embraced the Young Turk ideology.

In 1897, Ali Fehmi promised to publish whatever was beneficial to the public. He was aware of the necessity of cultural development for the well-being of Muslim community in Bulgaria and he sought to politically empower them. In fact, he ventured into journalism out of concern for the education and progress of Muslims in Bulgaria. While freely expressing criticisms of the Ottoman Empire, he directed the same critical eye towards factors that hindered Muslim education and advancement. He criticized officials abusing their duties, which prevented Muslim progress. Ali Fehmi accordingly aimed to create a proactive community around *Muvazene*. He encouraged his audience to read more, make better decisions, progress further, and not surrender their lives into the hands of others.

Muvazene, which started its publication by taking advantage of freedom of press in Bulgaria, became one of the longest-running newspapers in the country, much to the ire of Ottoman authorities who were unhappy with Ali Fehmi's editorial policies and the newspaper's critical content. The repeated attempts by Ottoman officials to shut down *Muvazene* resulted in a prolonged stalemate which lasted until 1905, ultimately turning Ali Fehmi and the *Muvazene* newspaper into a diplomatic issue between the Ottoman and Bulgarian governments in later years.

Every week, Ali Fehmi selected and published the most essential content by examining numerous telegrams and newspapers for his readers.

He frequently benefited from Filibe's communication network and accessible city library. He learned about the conditions of schools and endowments in various regions through letters sent by readers and shared this information with his readers. If there were any abuses by bureaucrats, he honestly reported them on the pages of his newspaper. He particularly focused on three key issues that, in his view, had been causing a great suffering among the Muslim community in Bulgaria: the condition of Muslim schools, the office of the mufti, and the loss of endowment properties.

His subscribers consisted of teachers, merchants, artisans, administrators, and scholars, which illustrated the wide range of individual that *Muvazene* came to appeal. *Muvazene's* popularity also illustrated in a sense that people from different backgrounds had eagerly been waiting for a long time to discuss and debate the issues that were central to the wellbeing of Bulgarian Muslims. In addition to addressing this niche need, *Muvazene* also covered diplomatic, social, and economic topics, while providing a forum for intellectual debates, diplomatic discussions, and giving a platform to the underrepresented, especially Muslim peoples, around the world.

Although Ali Fehmi emphasized neutrality in the early days of *Muvazene*, his biography and the data that his *Muvazene* newspaper provides indicate that Ali Fehmi played an active role in shaping what is often regarded as the Young Turk ideology. He was invited as a representative of the Bulgarian Muslims to the 1902 Congress and wrote about the discussions and decisions made during the Paris meeting in his newspaper. He consistently supported constitutional monarchy. As the years went by, his criticisms towards the Ottoman regime had only intensified. However, it would not be entirely accurate to say that his ideals were solely shaped around his Young Turk identity. After all, Ali Fehmi was a character devoted to the concerns of Bulgarian Muslims, a regional agenda that greatly defined him. In pursuit of empowering the Muslims in the country, he attempted to run for the Bulgarian parliament in 1901. In the same

year, he also published a brochure titled “Bulgarian Muslims,” which illustrated his continued interest in the local conditions of Muslims in the country.

After his unsuccessful attempt to enter the parliament, Ali Fehmi returned back to his journalism career and moved *Muvazene* to Varna in 1901, where it was based until 1903. In 1903, due to his role as a court member in Filibe, he relocated his newspaper back to Filibe. It was around this time that Ali Fehmi's publications began to draw the ire of Bulgarian authorities. His aggressive language, anti-Russian writings, and criticism of the Bulgarian government were among the reasons for this. In fact, the Russian consul had informed the Ottoman government about *Muvazene*'s efforts to incite the Islamic world against the Russians. In March 1905, an attack occurred targeting *Muvazene*'s office and the newspaper's entry into Russia was prohibited. Subsequently, Ali Fehmi was deported from Bulgaria. According to Ali Fehmi's narrative, the Bulgarian government had decided to hand him over to Abdülhamid in exchange for a desired trade agreement with the Ottoman Empire.

Ali Fehmi, expelled from Bulgaria, went to Paris. During this period, he faced the danger of arrest and deportation from Europe. Eventually, he chose to settle in Geneva and published a few more issues of *Muvazene* there. While in Geneva, he decided to join the Young Turks in November 1906. However, he could not continue to publish the newspaper in Switzerland. Towards the end of 1906, he received an invitation from the Afghan Emir to come to Afghanistan. Consequently, he left Geneva, but unable to cross Russian borders due to his previous provocative publications, he traveled to Afghanistan via Egypt. In Afghanistan, he engaged in Pan-Turkist activities, served as a consultant to the Afghan Ministry of Finance, maintained regular communication with the Committee of Union and Progress, and reported all his activities to the organization. He also launched a newspaper called *Afganistan'dan Bir Sada* (*An Echo from Afghanistan*) to represent Ottoman-Afghanistan relations—an episode that was not addressed in this study.

In Afghanistan, Ali Fehmi was treated with respect as the representative of the Ottoman Empire. He observed the increasing expectations of

Afghanistan from Istanbul. On November 11, 1908, he sent a telegram to the parliamentary assembly, conveying these observations. In the telegram read during the first session on December 23, 1908, Ali Fehmi congratulated Enver and Niyazi Bey, and invited the assembly to view all Turks as a single nation, race, and language, urging the assembly to unite all Turks worldwide under single roof. He emphasized the need for a centralized and sentimental policy for Turks living in regions such as Russia, China, and Afghanistan. He expressed his efforts to maintain the existing allegiance and agreement with the Afghan Emir and his brother on this matter. Consequently, even as a formality, he requested that a letter be written from the assembly to the Afghan Emir.

After the declaration of constitutional monarchy in 1908, Ali Fehmi returned to Istanbul with an imperial edict and continued publishing *Muvazene* in Istanbul for a few more months. Ali Fehmi often emphasized that he endured all hardships for the welfare of his people. Despite being constantly belittled, he finally reunited with his beloved nation and homeland with the declaration of the constitutional monarchy. However, his stay in Istanbul was short-lived. In 1912, he went to Damascus, where he served as the head of Tahrir-i Musakafat and worked in the committee for resettling Muslim refugees from war-torn areas. During the First World War in 1914, he served on the Greek-Armenian deportation commission and carried out his duties in Akşehir. In 1915, he went to Izmir and then returned to Istanbul, where he worked as the Director of General of Refugee Affairs. In 1919, he served on another commission investigating crimes committed against Ottoman Armenians. Ali Fehmi was assassinated in his home in Kartal in 1922.

Overall, although his biography is filled with intriguing details, they provide a complexity that presents a challenge to researchers to fit Ali Fehmi into a single category. Just like the Muslim community in Bulgaria, Ali Fehmi's identity was also defined by uncertainties and ambivalence. He was seen by Bulgaria as a foreign, dangerous, and provocative Muslim; by the Ottoman government as an enemy dissident; and among the Young Turks, he was identified as a neutral representative of Muslims. Amid these relative definitions, Ali Fehmi's most tangible and clearest activities

include contributing to the establishment of Young Turk ideology in the Balkans, making *Muvazene* newspaper one of the most significant tools for Young Turk propaganda over time, advocating for constitutional rule, rallying Bulgarian Muslims, and engaging in diplomatic activities in Afghanistan. By using *Muvazene*, Ali Fehmi embarked on this adventurous journey, dedicating himself to the advancement and progress of Muslims, first locally and then globally. His life story and all editions of *Muvazene* newspaper stand as a rich field open to a much more detailed analysis, with a clear potential to contribute to the existing literature on the Muslims in Bulgaria in general and the Young Turks in particular.

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