



## The Reform Movements In The Reign Of Selim Iii And Their Effect On The People In Istanbul

*III Selim Devrindeki Reform Hareketleri Ve Istanbul Halkına Etkileri*

### ABSTRACT

While the Ottoman Empire was transforming from principality to state and from state to empire, it had a strong state organization by making continuous progress. However, due to some internal and external problems that emerged at the end of the 18th century, the Empire began to lose its power. During this weakening period, the enthroned monarchs made some reforms to correct this situation, but these reforms were not successful because they were limited to their own periods. Unlike the previous rulers, Sultan Selim III, who ascended the throne in 1789, saw the main source of the problem in the janissary corps and took steps in this regard. First, he tried to discipline the janissary corps again, but when he was unsuccessful, he established a new army (Nizam'ı Cedid) and started to train this army according to European standards. However, this new army, founded by Selim III, was not welcomed by the Ulema and the public, as it resembled European soldiers in terms of clothing. Ignoring the discontent of the people, on the revolt of the Janissaries against the reforms Selim III had to disband this new army, which he had built. In this article, the effect of the reforms made by Selim III on the people of Istanbul and the people's perspective on the reforms were tried to be examined.

**Keywords:** III. Selim, Ottoman Empire, Reform, Nizam of Cedid.

### ÖZET

Osmanlı Devleti beylikten devlet haline, devletten ise imparatorluğa dönüşürken sürekli olarak bir ilerleme kaydederek güçlü bir devlet teşkilatına sahip olmuştur. Fakat 18. yüzyılın sonlarında ortaya çıkan bazı iç ve dış sorunlar nedeniyle İmparatorluk gücünü kaybetmeye başlamıştır. Bu zayıflama dönemi içerisinde tahta oturan hükümdarlar bu durumu düzeltmek için birtakım reformlar yapmışlar da bu reformlar sadece kendi dönemleri ile sınırlı kaldığı için başarılı olamamışlardır. Önceki hükümdarlardan farklı olarak 1789 yılında tahta oturan Sultan Selim III sorunun esas kaynağını yeniçeri ocağında görmüş ve bu konuda adımlar atmıştır. İlk olarak yeniçeri ocağını yeniden disiplin altına almaya çalışmış fakat başarılı olamayınca yeni bir ordu kurarak (Nizam'ı Cedid) bu orduyu Avrupa standartlarına göre eğitmeye başlamıştır. Fakat III Selim'in kurmuş olduğu bu yeni ordu giyim kuşam yönünden Avrupa askerlerine benzediği için Ulema ve halk tarafından hoş karşılanmamıştır. Halkın hoşnutsuzluğunu dikkate almayan III Selim daha sonra reformlar karşısında yeniçerilerin isyan etmesi üzerin kurmuş olduğu bu yeni orduyu dağıtmak zorunda kalmıştır. Bu makalede III Selim'in yapmış olduğu reformların İstanbul halkı üzerindeki etkisi ve halkın reformlara bakışı incelenmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: III. Selim, Osmanlı Devleti, Reform, Nizam'ı Cedid

### INTRODUCTION

The Ottoman Empire was competitive on the battlefield until the eighteenth century. After this date, the Ottoman Empire had begun to lose power because of several factors. The most important of them were military and political factors. Until Selim III, the sultans were not as successful in developments in the military and political fields because they did not realize the technological and military developments in Europe. Selim III realized that the empire fell behind its rivals, the European states, and therefore initiated a series of radical reforms. Therefore, he has been known as the first reformist sultan of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> Selim III knew that to accomplish these reforms, they should cover all the government's institutions. Therefore, he established a new, modern army that was created according to the European army style. The name of this new army was Nizam-i Cedid (New Order). He also opened modern schools. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire political system was also outdated. Until the reign of Selim III, the Ottoman Empire did not have permanent ambassadors in European countries. Sultan Selim

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Grant, Rethinking the Ottoman "Decline": Military Technology Diffusion in the Ottoman Empire, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, Journal Of World History, Vol:10, No:1, 1999, s. 198.

III also established the first permanent embassies in some European countries such as France, Britain and Spain.<sup>3</sup> However, those reform movements failed because of some opposition movements in the Ottoman Empire. The old army members and religious leaders were the first of these opponents to voice their complaints.

Ulama<sup>4</sup> were complaining about the reforms that were brought from European countries and according to the religious authority, the Europeans are not Muslim, and, therefore, whatever comes from Europe is unacceptable. The Janissaries<sup>5</sup> were afraid of losing their job, and additional salary that they were taking from the empire. In this way, they had provoked the people against the reign of Selim III and his reforms. However, there were also internal and external factors that helped the provocation of the Janissaries and Ulama. These were the war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia and its consequence that scarcity of food in Istanbul. The other reason was corruption that was made by the reformist in the advisory council. They started to use the funds for the interests of their own benefits. As a result of these issues, the people began to show their anger against the rule of Selim III. The dimension of the troubles that religious leaders caused in the Ottoman Empire increased. Furthermore, the unsuccessful attempt to dissolve the uprisings in different part of the Ottoman Empire caused the spread this uprising to affect Istanbul 1807. At the end of the uprising, Selim III was killed and Sultan Mustafa IV became a new sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

These comprehensive reform movements, which were in the field of military, administration system, and education, of the Ottoman Empire within only a few decades is very important for the Ottoman Empire. While historians have tended to focus on the political and military aspects of these reform movements, they do not give enough attention to the impact of these reform movements on people in the Ottoman Empire. In the existing literature, Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III 1789-1807*<sup>6</sup> and Tuncay Zorlu's *Innovation and Empire in Turkey: Sultan Selim III and the Modernisation of the Ottoman Navy*<sup>7</sup>, stand out as two pioneering works on the topic and offer useful introductions into the historical reasons behind the reform movement in the reign of Selim III. However, they are somewhat limited in their scope. Shaw examines the entire reign of Selim III without paying attention to the uprising. Zorlu focuses on only the innovation in the Ottoman Navy and its evolution in the reign of Selim III. This article traces why the people in Istanbul supported the uprising against the Selim III reforms focusing on the internal and external factors that provoked people against the reforms and reformist statesmen.

## THE SITUATION OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The Ottoman Empire had enjoyed continuous progress and development from its establishment to the end of the seventeenth century. However, the empire began to lose its power over time because of a number of internal and external issues, even though it created an enormous state organization and expanded its borders. Therefore, a number of reformation attempts were undertaken to maintain the existence of the state and revive its power again, in the Stagnation and Decline Periods.<sup>8</sup> However, many of the reformer sultans did not attempt to make radical reforms, and the limited reform attempts did not do enough to save the empire.

In the eighteenth century, the civil administration of the Ottoman Empire was in anarchy, and viziers were blamed for almost all those problems. Indeed, viziers were elected, not according to their talent, experience, and moral status; on the contrary, viziers assumed power through bribery, nepotism and favoritism at that time. The same issues were also true for other statesmen. All the government officials who were appointed in this way were trying to retrieve the bribes that they had been given from the public throughout their duties. Ayans, who had dominated their regions by assigning people and abandoning the traditional selection methods, had also begun to increase

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Naff, "Reform and the Conduct of Ottoman Diplomacy in the Reign of Selim III 1789- 1807," American Oriental Society ,1963, s. 295.

<sup>4</sup> Religious leaders, teacher or men who teach and learn the sacred islamic law.

<sup>5</sup> Janizary spelled in turkish Turkish Yeniçeri ("New Troop") they were the elite corps of the Ottoman Empire's army. It established in the late fourteenth and demolished in the early nineteenth century. They were originally soldiers who captured in wars, but the system was changed in a while. Christian youths were levied from Balkan vassals, converted to Islam, and though paid a regular salary inducted into the ranks of the sultan's slaves.

<sup>6</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III 1789-1807*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

<sup>7</sup> Tuncay Zorlu, *Innovation and Empire in Turkey: Sultan Selim III and the Modernisation of the Ottoman Navy*. London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> The middle east historians separate the history of the Ottoman Empire in different time period and the Stagnation period covers from 1579 to 1699. The Decline periods covers from 1699 to 1807- end of the Reign of Selim III. After this time period, the dissolution period started.

oppression and cruelty on people.<sup>9</sup> Some of the Ulemas did not have enough information about the religion and their information based on the stereotypical learning, therefore, they were standing away from the concepts of rights, justice, and wisdom. On the other side, the civil administration system of the empire also was in a bad condition. Corruption became additional revenue for the Viziers and Ayans. When the Empire had made the decision to go to war, Viziers and Ayans had collected more war taxes from the local people than they needed, and shared it among themselves.<sup>10</sup> In short, the civil administration system of the Ottoman Empire performed poorly at the end of eighteenth century, and there was great chaos in public administration and social life.

The situation in the military was not very different from other government's institutions. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Janissary Corps lost their position in the empire when the rules of the camp were ignored and replaced by new traditions. The principle that the Janissary Corps was to protect the empire was replaced by the Empire is for the Janissary Corps. The recent wars with Russia and Austria had shown the level of the military power.<sup>11</sup> Janissaries, who represented the main strength of the army, started to turn into an army that had no discipline and was untrained. In addition, the Janissaries remained behind in the developments of weapon and battle techniques. Separately, the Janissaries had started to enjoy with the politics as well. Consequently, it was nearly impossible to initiate any reform on any issue without having the support of Janissaries. Moreover, Janissaries were changing or killing the statesmen and the sultans who wanted to make reforms, or they were uprising to force the empire into accepting their demands. In short, Janissary troops engaged in politics so much that they forgot their original professions. Anyone could get a Janissary salary book, called "esame", and easily became a Janissary easily. Trade and marriage bans had been forgotten and most of the Janissaries worked in various additional jobs, such butchery, greengrocery, and started having family. In addition, in wartime, most of them either fled from the war or did not go to war<sup>12</sup>

### THE REIGN OF SELIM III AND HIS REFORM MOVEMENTS

It is possible to say that the reform movements began in the Ottoman Empire in the beginning of the seventeenth century. However, the reform movements, until Selim III, would often go through specific areas particularly in the military field, and they were limited by the reformers and their successors did not perform the same efforts or follow their predecessors. Unlike other Sultans in the Ottoman Empire, Selim III, even when he was a prince, was planning to understand the European culture and civilization and apply the reforms by relying on the technical supremacy of European countries. Nevertheless, he had to find aid of a country from Europe for these reform movements and when Selim III was a prince, he was in contact with Louis XVI, King of France.<sup>13</sup> Selim III had chosen France because it was one of most powerful countries in Europe at that time and also before he became a sultan, the other ottoman sultans had close political relation with France. For example, in the reign of Mustafa III (1757-1774), Baron de Tott who was the expert on producing cannons and weapon technology, came to Istanbul and helped to produce new technological cannons, and gave advice for the restoration of the castles.<sup>14</sup>

The overall situation of the Ottoman Empire was in very bad condition, when Selim III ascended to the throne in 1889. The reform movements initiated by his predecessor sultans had failed and the bad trend of the empire was not stopped.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the empire's economic condition was in a bad state as well because of the ongoing war, which had begun in 1787 between the Ottoman Empire and Russia. There were numerous defeats in the fronts of the war between Ottoman Empire and Russia, and the empire lost some of its territories. Selim III realized the bad position of the Ottoman Empire when he was a prince, and by taking lessons from his predecessor, he had many reform ideas to correct the situation of the empire as soon as he ascending to the throne. However, he waited until the end of the war with Russia in 1792 to initiate the reform movements.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Meşhur Rumeli Ayanlarından Tirsinikli İsmail, Yılıkoğlu Süleyman Ağalar ve Alemdar Mustafa Paşa*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1942, s. 4-7.

<sup>10</sup> Sema Yeli, *III Selim Dönemi Askeri ve Eğitim Alanındaki İslahat Hareketleri*, Master's thesis, Fırat University, 2005, s. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Mehmet Alaaddin Yalçınkaya, *The Role Of The Principalities Of Wallachia And Moldavia On Ottoman Foreign Policy At The Time Of Selim III (1789-1807)*, *Politics and International Studies*, No:1 2018, s. 187.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmet Refik Altınay, Kabakçı Mustafa, ed. Mehmet İlhan, trans. Enfel Doğan, İstanbul: Heyamola Yayınları, 2005, s. 24.

<sup>13</sup> Uğur Ünal, III. Selim Dönemi İslahat Çabaları (Nizam'ı Cedid), Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Yakınçağ Bilim Dalı Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2001, s. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Virginia Aksan, *Breaking the Spell of the Baron de Tott: Reframing the Question of Military Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1760-1830*, *The International History Review* V:24, 2002, s. 254.

<sup>15</sup> Uzunçarşılı, *Meşhur Rumeli Ayanlarından Tirsinikli İsmail*, s. 62-64.

<sup>16</sup> Mütercim Ahmed Asım Efendi, *Asım Efendi Tarihi: Osmanlı Tarihi 1218-1824/1804-1809*, Hazırlayan: Ziya Yılmaz, C. 1, Türkiye Yazma Esler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, İstanbul, 2015, s. 215-219.



Before initiating the reform movements, Selim III first established an advisory council and gathered the government dignitaries in this council because he was smart enough to realize that he had not experienced much in state affairs and did not yet have a clear outline for the reforms. Furthermore, in this way, he would have opportunity to learn the situation of the empire through the eyes of the authorities, and he would get rid of the trouble of being alone in his reform movements, by inviting many statesmen to meeting for the reform program. Selim III wanted all the problems of the empire to be expressed openly in this meeting. Everyone in the meeting expressed many of the issues from the atrocities committed to the public to unlawful tax collection from the public and from the disorder and disobedience in military corps, to flanerie and nondiligence seen in the civil servants at the top positions.<sup>17</sup>

After receiving the necessary oral reports from the statesmen, he wanted a report from the statesmen in writing, explaining their views and ideas to stop the bad situation of the empire. In this way, he would have opportunity to learn their ideas about the state and reform movements, and also he would learn from the knowledge and experience of the team he would employ. In this context, a large number of statements were delivered to Selim III. Although these presented statements covered regulations of the state's military, economic, political, financial, and religious institutions, in general, the military reforms were more prominent than reforms in other institutions.<sup>18</sup> Although most of the writers of the statements acknowledged the existing problems in the military system, they were not in favor of completely changing the military system. Although the suggestions of these statements were basically on the rehabilitation of existing military corps and correcting the deficiencies, the ideas of the owners of the statements can be divided into three groups. The conservative first group proposed that the Janissary Corps and other military corps should be improved in accordance with the laws in the reign of the Suleiman the Magnificent. The second group was recommended to train Janissaries in accordance with the French instruction and training techniques. The third group of reformers proposed that the elimination or correction of the Janissary Corps would not be possible and they advocated exempting the Janissary corps from any reform and establishing a new army, in accordance with the French armies and European techniques.<sup>19</sup> Statements written by Resid Efendi and Abdullah Efendi proposed that the young people from Anatolia should be recruited for the creation of this new army, and it should be completely different from the existing military corps and it should train with a different discipline.<sup>20</sup>

When Selim III received reports in writing from the statesmen, he established a reform committee consisting of 12 members, who were the supporters of the reforms entirely for the contribution to the reform movements. This committee created a reformation program and started the reform movements in a short time. According to this reform program, the existing military centers should be regulated, a new, modern style army should be formed and war industry institutions would be reorganized. Although at first hoping the improve the Janissaries, in case of a reaction from Janissaries against the reform movements and to the new army to be established, these efforts failed and the reform council reached an agreement to establish a new army that called *Nizam-i Cedid* (New Order).<sup>21</sup> After they decided to establish a new army, the statesmen in the advisory council, began to debate how to meet the costs of the newly established army and pay the soldiers' salary. Therefore, they decided to establish a new treasury totally independent from old treasury of the Ottoman Empire and an additional treasure called "*Iradi Cedid*" (New Treasury) was founded. Because the existing Ottoman treasury could not cover the cost of additional army costs due to the bad situation of the empire, and it had been decided to pay the costs of the army from this new treasury. In addition, Ottoman Empire had announced new taxes to provide funds to the *Iradi Cedid*, because it was not possible to transfer funds from the main treasury to the newly established *Iradi Cedid*, due to the failure of the Ottoman Empire at the wars in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

## IMPACT OF REFORMS ON PEOPLE IN ISTANBUL AND HOSTILITY OF PEOPLE AGAINST REFORMS

The innovations and reform movements in economic, administrative, political areas in the Ottoman Empire were not accomplished because of the negative propagandas against the reform movements. In addition, many internal and external failures of the empire and failure of the reform attempts led to abdication of the throne of Selim III. In other words, although the reform movements initiated by Selim III marked a big step forward to bring the Ottoman

<sup>17</sup> Enver Ziya Karal, *Selim III'ün Hattı Humayunları: Nizam'ı Cedid 1789-1807*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara, 1946, s. 36-40.

<sup>18</sup> III. Selim'e Sunulan Islahat Layihaları, ed. Erol Özvar, trans. Ergin Cagman, Bayrak Matbaası, İstanbul, 2010, s. XVIII-XXXIX.

<sup>19</sup> III. Selim'e Sunulan Islahat Layihaları, s. 1-7.

<sup>20</sup> III. Selim'e Sunulan Islahat Layihaları, s. 54-60.

<sup>21</sup> Adil Sen, *Osmanlıda Donum Noktası*, Fcr Yayınları, Ankara, 2003, s.38.

<sup>22</sup> Mahmut Raif Efendi ve Nizam'ı Cedid'e Dair Eseri, trans. Kemal Beydilli and İlhan Şahin, Türk Tarih Kurum Basımevi, Ankara, 2001, s. 44-5.



Empire to the level of modern states, the reform movements failed; and additionally, this led to the end of his reign. Of course, the small number of people among the statesmen who implemented the reforms, played a major role in the emergence of this situation.

Three factors caused both the failure of the reform movement of Selim III and the decline of confidence in the reign of Selim III and provoked the people in Istanbul to an uprising. The first and most important factor that provoked the people was the spending of funds for the interests of statesmen who were the in the reform council. The aim of the funds that collected in Irad-i Cedid was the cover the expenses of the Nizam-i Cedid army, by they began to spend these fund for their own needs.<sup>23</sup> The second factor was the war between Ottoman Empire, Russia, and England. Because of this war, for the first time in the history of Ottoman Empire, the enemy ships came in front of Istanbul and laid siege to the city for ten days.<sup>24</sup> The third factor was the the role of the inexperienced statesmen and the opposition of Ulemas to the reform movements. As result of the inexperienced statesman wrong decision, city started to go in chaos. The commodity prices increased because of the increased costs incurred by the state budget and the new taxes. For these reasons, the conservative statesmen, who were opposed the reforms, had been looking for the opportunity to put an end to Nizam-i Cedid reforms and to subvert the reign of Selim III. In addition, because the Ottoman Empire is an Islamic state by society, Ulemas and Sheikh al-Islam had a huge impact on the public due to their status as religious leaders. Selim III was not asking for the opinions of Ulemas and Sheikh ul-Islam for his reforms; instead, Selim III had only used the ideas of the statesmen in the advisory council he had created when he was making decisions about the reform movements. This behavior of Selim III caused the formation of strong opposition against him, and Ulema and Sheikh al-Islam had begun to criticize the reforms of Selim III at every opportunity.<sup>25</sup>

The first incident that caused opposition against the reform of Selim III and his reign was the corruption of the statesmen assigned by Sultan for his reforms, after a certain period of time. Selim III administration feared the reactions from the public and the Janissaries; and therefore, at the beginning of the reform movements, it hid the nature of the reforms and they tried to be as discreet as possible as it decided on reforms. However, this secrecy was short lived, and many of these decisions made in the meeting began to wander outside in public. Cevdet Pasha described this situation in his book by emphasizing this situation and stresses that they started to organize binges at nights, which against Islamic law, sometimes at their own homes or at Bosphorus, and started to talk about the state secrets with the surrounding people in these fun conversations. For example, once there was a top-secret meeting in the palace of Topkapi, and even the Vizierate governor Pasha was not accepted in, but soon after the meeting, the decisions made in this secret meeting had begun to be discussed in coffeehouses. In addition to this situation, many people in the advisory council began to spend the money, which was collected for the reform, for their own personal interests. Many individuals in the advisory council had residences built at the sides of Bosphorus, and started to spend these funds for their own pleasure.<sup>26</sup>

People gradually began to hate the reformist statesmen and Nizam'i Cedid reforms when they began to see and hear from different people that these statesmen in Selim III's advisory council indulged in binges, and accumulated their own wealth. Of course, this wastefulness by statesmen was not the only reason that provoked the people against to the Nizam-i Cedid reforms. Another reason was the increased prices of supplies and goods in Istanbul due to the imposed new taxes. When the problems were reported to statesmen, the statesmen did not take any action on these issues. The statesmen, who did not care about the complaints of the people for lack of livelihood, and the increased prices of supplies, were thinking "let people worry about livelihood, so that we rest."<sup>27</sup> Selim III also had no chance to learn about the issues. Selim III was addicted to music and conversation and had a gentle temperament. Due to this personality, he was organizing evening entertainments on the Bosphorus, and was delving into the sprees of pleasure and delight. The Bosphorus was full with cruise boats under the moonlight at nights that were identical to the time in the Tulip Period of Sultan Ahmet III.<sup>28</sup> When he asked the statesmen the situation of the people, the statesmen had expressed to him that his reign was better than periods of previous Sultans, and although people were having difficulties because of the new taxes, this would be corrected when the Nizam'i Cedid reforms were

<sup>23</sup> Ahmet Cevdet Pasa, "Tarih-i Cevdet" (1858): 143, quoted in Ahmet Rasim, *Osmanlı'da Batışın Üç Evresi*, trans. H.V. Velideoğlu, Evrim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1987, s. 107.

<sup>24</sup> Ubeydullah Kusmani and Ebubekir Efendi, *Asiler ve Gaziler*, trans. Aysel Danacı Yıldız, Kitap Yayın Evi, İstanbul, 2007, s. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Şen, *Osmanlı'da Dönüm Noktası*, s.54.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmet Rasim, *Osmanlı'da Batışın Üç Evresi*, s.106

<sup>27</sup> Sipahi Çataltepe, *19 Yüzyıl Başlarında Avrupa dengesi ve Nizam'ı Cedid Ordusu*, Göçebe Yayınları, İstanbul, 1997, s. 247.

<sup>28</sup> Kemal Beydilli, "III. Selim: Aydınlanmış Hükümdar", *Nizâm-ı Kadîm'den Nizâm-ı Cedîd'e III. Selim ve Dönemi* ed. Seyfi Kenan, Isami Yayınları, İstanbul, 2010, s. 52.



completed. For these reasons, hostility of the people towards the statesmen started to increase slowly, and failure of the reign of Selim III started to be discussed in public. Ebubekir Efendi, who lived in the reign of Selim III, and was present in the rebellion started against Selim III, criticized strongly these reformist statesmen and said:

"They had invented unprecedented and unheard praxis called Nizam-i Cedid, and had victimized through Irad-i Cedid. Almost all of these innovations were only for their own interests. Each of them had imitated the infidels in their homes, clothings, and all other matters, and had tried to convert our state to the Christian states."<sup>29</sup>

In fact, these words by Ebubekir Efendi summarize why the people were against the Nizam'i Cedid. The people of the state gradually felt that they were slowly being converted into Christian states, because the new army had been established by inspiration from the European states. In addition to growing public reaction to the reform movement, there were also two groups against the reform movements from its very beginning. These were the Janissaries and the Ulema class. As mentioned earlier, the real reason behind the initiation of Nizam'i Cedid reforms and establishment of a new army by Selim III was the deterioration in the Janissaries, and the fact that the majority of the Janissary troops now worked as grocers or butchers and started to have families. Moreover, anyone could get the Janissary salary book, called "esame", and become a Janissary. Therefore, more than half of the people in Istanbul were taking salaries from the Janissary Corps at the same time.<sup>30</sup>

Even though more than half of the population were Janissaries, and they were very effective in management, they did not have much success in wars. Therefore, Selim III first planned to establish a new army, without proposing any regulation to the Janissaries. He planned to eliminate the Janissaries completely after the new army achieved sufficient power and enough numbers. This idea by the Sultan began to circulate among Janissaries, and the people and this situation became a major obstacle for Janissaries in front of the reform movements, because in addition to their current professions like butcher and baker, the salary that they took from the Janissary Corps was a source of additional income for these people.<sup>31</sup> If the Janissaries were eliminated, many people either would be unemployed or would lose the additional income from the Janissary Corps. These kinds of rumors circulating among the Janissaries caused an increase of the hostilities of Janissaries against the reign of Selim III and Nizam-i Cedid reforms. In addition, more than half of the people of Istanbul were Janissaries and the Janissary troops were the strongest army of the Ottoman army since the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, people were thinking that the power of the Ottoman Empire at that period was due to the Janissaries.<sup>32</sup> Because of this kind of opinion of the people about the Janissaries, the people of Istanbul started to hate the Nizam-i Cedid troops, and did not want to accept the Nizam'i Cedid as the new main power of the Ottoman Empire.

In addition, the uniforms of Nizam-i Cedid troops were very different from the uniforms of traditional Janissary troops. The Nizam-i Cedid soldiers dressed like the French troops. The people of Istanbul argued, "These newly established Nizam-i Cedid troops have no place in our Islamic state, their training is thoroughly French."<sup>33</sup> The Ulema's reason for opposing the reform was not based entirely on religious reasons. The corruption and degeneration that emerged in many of the state institutions also aroused in the Ulama class. Many individuals among the Ulemas had risen to Ulema class by bribery or nepotism. These people lacked true religious knowledge and acted with only stereotypical information. Therefore, the reform movements made by Selim III also covered adjustments on the Ulema class. According to the regulations, in order for a person to be a Ulema, he should be having a certain education approved by Sheikh al-Islam. Of course, not every person in Ulema was like that. There were also people who had true knowledge to show the right path to the public in religious manner.<sup>34</sup>

On the other side, Ulema had a huge impact on the Ottoman society. The people considered the fatwas of Ulema as a law; therefore, they played a major role in the regulation of social life. After certain period of time the reformist statesmen had begun to get engage with the binges of pleasure and delight and tended to increase their own wealth. In addition, their attitudes for reforms like making decisions without asking the Ulemas for their opinions on the reforms had increased the hostility of Ulemas against to the statesmen. Therefore, most of the Ulemas were using their authority over people by provoking them against the reforms of Selim III. They were advocating that reforms that were taking from European countries would ruin the moral values of the Muslim society because they are not

<sup>29</sup> Kusmani, *Asiler ve Gaziler*, s. 61.

<sup>30</sup> Suraiya Faroqhi, "In quest of their daily bread: Istanbul artisan under Selim III'in Nizam'ı Kadim'den Nizam'ı Cedid'e: III Selim ve Dönemi / Selim III and His Era: from Ancien Regime to New Order" ed. Seyfi Kenan, *Isam Yayinlari*, Istanbul, 2010 s. 180.

<sup>31</sup> Kusmani, *Asiler ve Gaziler*, s. 66.

<sup>32</sup> Altınay, *Kabakci Mustafa*, s. 38.

<sup>33</sup> Ahmet Rasim, *Osmanlı'da Batışın Üç Evresi*, s. 78.

<sup>34</sup> Ahmet Rasim, *Osmanlı'da Batışın Üç Evresi*, s. 80.



Muslim states.<sup>35</sup> Due to the increased hostility of Ulema against the Nizam'i Cedid reforms, they started to preach in mosques that the only reason for the difficulty and suffering of the people was Nizam-i Cedid, adding that "A person that dresses the army with pants, harms the Imams and considers French as wise does not deserve the Sultanate."<sup>36</sup>

Another event that caused to people to think that reign of Sultan Selim III had failed and the initiated reform movements were harmful to the Empire was the war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia and United Kingdom (1806-1812). As a result of this war, for the first time in the history of Ottoman Empire, the enemy ships had come in front of Istanbul and laid siege to the city for ten days.<sup>37</sup> There were two reasons for the war; the first reason was that as a result of the daily increasing number of the soldiers in the Nizam-i Cedid corps, the Ottoman Empire began to follow a different economic policy to reduce the financial losses that caused by the chartered merchants. The second reason was the dismissing of voivodes in Wallachia and Moldavia by the Ottoman Empire without requesting permission of Russia for these events.

Due to the economic privileges given by the Ottoman Empire to the European states, the Greek merchants who were living in the Ottoman Empire were getting charters from the Russian Empire. Therefore, they were also benefiting the rights and customs exemption that no Muslim merchants had in the Ottoman Empire. As result of that situation, the Ottoman Empire sent a note the Russian embassy and reported that none of the Ottoman merchants were allowed to have the Russian flag. Consequently, the Russian embassy stated that they would not issue a title of privilege for anybody who had not resided in Russia at least for three years by showing their reaction against the new trade regulation of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of the alliance between the Russian empire and the United Kingdom, United Kingdom ambassador Arbuthnot notified the Ottoman officers that Ottoman Empire could also be an opponent with England if any war occurred between Ottoman Empire and Russia. Therefore, he warned the Ottoman officers that the Ottoman Empire should withdraw its new regulation on the Russian carter merchants. Of course, the real reason of the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was not that trade regulation that brought some restriction on the Russian carter merchants but it helps to increase hostility between these two countries. The problems between Russia and the Ottoman Empire that began with the restrictions on charter merchants, gained a new dimension when the voivodes<sup>39</sup> in Wallachia and Moldavia dismissed by the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire dismissed the voivodes in Wallachia and Moldavia because according the Ottoman officers, they were supporting the Serb rebellions that started in Balkans and new voivodes were assigned instead of them.<sup>40</sup> The suspension of voivodes of Wallachia and Moldavia by the Ottoman Empire without asking to the Russia was an enough reason to declare a war for Russia. According to "Clarke-d'Obrill" alliance treaty in 1799, the situation of Bosphorus, the tenure of voivodes in Wallachia and Moldavia, and the supply of troops in allied states during the wartime were assured and if any states did not keep the agreement, it caused the declaration of war between these allied states. In addition, this treaty confirmed the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, Russia and France. According to this treaty, voivodes would stay in their mission for seven years, and they would only be discharged with the permission of Russia.<sup>41</sup>

Russia's reaction to the dismissal of voivodes in Wallachia and Moldavia by the Ottoman Empire without the permission of Russia was harsher than its reaction to restrictions on Russian charter merchants. The Russian ambassador Italinsky sent a letter to the Ottoman Empire that expressed various concerns; the closed of Bosphorus to Russian ships, trade difficulties and illegal custom rates. In addition, he asked that the voivodes in Wallachia and Moldavia should be reappointed again. Otherwise, the Russian army would invade Wallachia and Moldavia and these regions would be under reign of Russia.<sup>42</sup> The Ottoman officers turned down this request of Russia thinking that the Ottoman Empire might lose its political power in the international arena if it accepted the demands of

<sup>35</sup> III Selimin Sirkatibi Ahmet Efendi Tarafından Tutulan Ruzname, trans. and ed. V. Sema Arıkan, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara,1993, s. 91.

<sup>36</sup> Kusmani, Asiler ve Gaziler, s.78.

<sup>37</sup> Mustafa Nuri Paşa, Netayic'ül -Vukuat, Kurumları ve Örgütleriyle Osmanlı Tarihi, Ankara 1992, C. III-IV, s. 215.

<sup>38</sup> Fatih Yeşil, "İstanbul Önlerinde Bir İngiliz Filosu: Uluslararası Bir Krizin Siyasi ve Askeri Anatomisi", ed. S. Kenan, *Nizâm-ı Kadîm'den Nizâm-ı Cedîd'e III. Selim ve Dönemi*, İstanbul 2010, s. 393.

<sup>39</sup> A local ruler or official in various parts of central and eastern Europe.

<sup>40</sup> William Wilkinson, An Account of The Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, Arno Press & The New York Times, New York, 1971, s. 179.

<sup>41</sup> Yeşil, İstanbul Önlerinde Bir İngiliz Filosu, s. 398.

<sup>42</sup> Yeşil, "İstanbul Önlerinde Bir İngiliz Filosu," s. 400.

Russia. As a result of this war, in 1806 Russian troops invaded Moldova and took under their control Bender and Hotin castles that across the borders of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>43</sup> Since most of the supply and food needs of Istanbul had been met from these territories, the invasion of these regions by Russia caused food shortages in the capital city. Due to the invasion, the Ottoman supply ships that went to these regions were turning back empty without taking any supplies, or they were taken prisoner by Russian warships.<sup>44</sup>

The United Kingdom and Russia was ally in that time and because of that the United Kingdom Ambassador Arbuthnot, who tried to prevent a possible war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, left Istanbul and went to the British warships in the Aegean Sea when his efforts failed to prevent war. The Ottoman Empire appointed Feyzullah Efendi, who supported Nizam-ı Cedid, for maintenance and strengthening of the forts at the Dardanelles Strait, against possible attack by the British navy located just outside of Dardanelles. However, the repairs in the Dardanelles did not complete in expected time and British navy passed through the Dardanelles Strait without taking any damage and they had taken Istanbul, under siege for ten days, and caused fear and confusion among people of the city.<sup>45</sup>

### **KABAKCI MUSTAFA REVOLT AND THE END OF SELIM III PERIOD**

The reform movements that the Selim III planned to initiate in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the eighteenth century did not give the expected results. The additional treasury founded for the Nizam-ı Cedid's costs introduced new taxes for the public and led to an increase in commodity prices in Istanbul. In addition to this, the statesmen in the advisory council, which was established by Selim III, started to spend the money that was collected for Nizam-ı Cedid's expenses and began to accumulate their own wealth, after a short period of time. This situation started to shake the confidence of public to the reign of Selim III and his reforms. Furthermore, the war with Russia and Great Britain (1806s-1812s) shook the reforms of the Sultan further. As a result of the war, scarcity occurred in the capital and food prices had increased. In addition, the most devastating blow for the reign of Selim III and his reform were the British war ships that came up in front of Istanbul. This situation caused the people to lose confidence in the reign of Selim III and his reform movements. The condition of the city was convenient to initiate revolt against the reign of Selim III.

In March 1805, Selim III ordered the implementation of compulsory military service and recruited all young people between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, in order to reduce heavy costs of the Nizam-ı Cedid army, which was consisted of volunteers with a certain salary. In addition, he ordered the establishment of Nizam-ı Cedid Corps in Anatolia and the Balkans, in order to promote the Nizam-ı Cedid troops all over the country. Due to the growth of hatred of the people against the Nizam-ı Cedid, several rebellions began in many parts of the Balkans. In order to suppress the revolts and calmed down the people, Selim III gave up this plan and canceled its implementation.<sup>46</sup> In addition, as mentioned previously that the Ulema and the Janissaries were against the reform movements initiated, there were three important names, who wanted to take advantage of these weaknesses of the Ulema and the Janissaries, for their own interests. These were Prince Mustafa, Shaykh al-Islam Topal Ata and the prefect Kose Musa. The aim of Prince Mustafa was putting an end to the rule of his uncle Selim III and to ascend to the throne. Sheikh ul-Islam Topalata was against the reception of the natural sciences and reforms from the Western states. Although the Prefect Kose Musa was against reforms, he appeared as a reformer to take side of Selim III. Kose Musa, an originally conservative statesman, desired to raise his position in the state by helping Mustafa IV to ascend to the throne, instead of Selim III, and also wanted to increase his wealth.<sup>47</sup>

Sultan Selim III appointed individuals from the opposition to the upper new positions in the state, in order to prevent any rebellion against his rule, and stop reactions from the opposition. For example, in order to appease the opposition after the riots in the Balkans, he dismissed Sheikh ul-Islam Ahmet Efendi, who was in favor of the reforms, and instead appointed the Janissary leader Ibrahim Agha as Grand Vizier, and opposing Topal Atallah Efendi as the Sheikh ul-Islam. Prefect Kose Musa was also in this opposition group, which was against the initiated reforms and the government of Selim III. The vizier was in the Russian campaign leading the army because of the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, beginning in 1806. Since the Vizier was in campaign, Selim III

<sup>43</sup> Asım Efendi, *Âsım Efendi Tarihi*, C. 1, s. 586-87.

<sup>44</sup> Faroqhi, "in Quest of their Daily Bread," s. 174.

<sup>45</sup> Kusmani, *Asiler ve Gaziler*, s. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Beydilli, "III Selim", s. 60.

<sup>47</sup> Altınay, *Kabakçı Mustafa*, s.74.





assigned the anti-reformist Topal Musa as prefect. The decision taken by Selim III had led to the end of his power at the same time.<sup>48</sup>

Prefect Kose Musa had an important role in the "Kabakci Mustafa" rebellion that was initiated against the rule of Selim III in Istanbul. Due to the ongoing Ottoman-Russian War, and the British Navy's presence in front of Istanbul, after passing through the straits, Selim III wanted to use the Nizam-ı Cedid troops at the forts in Bosphorus managed by the Janissary apprentices. The hate affair of Janissaries against Nizam-ı Cedid apprentices was already known. On top of this hostility, trying to dress the Janissary apprentices with Nizam-ı Cedid uniforms increased the hatred of the Janissaries. In May 1807, Halil Agha with company of small Nizam-ı Cedid troops went to a castle, which was managed by the Janissary apprentices, in the Anatolia side to pay their regular salary and persuaded them to accept the new training and uniforms.<sup>49</sup> In the eyes of the Janissaries, there were no difference between Russian soldiers and Nizam-ı Cedid troops, therefore, they revolted under the leadership of Kabakci Mustafa, when they had been attempted to wear Nizam-ı Cedid uniforms by saying "We are about to be converted to Muscovite, not Janissary."<sup>50</sup> The news of the rebellion soon spread to the Janissary apprentices in the other Bosphorus castles, and they upraised and killed their officers and the Nizam-ı Cedid officers who were appointed to train them.<sup>51</sup>

The rebellion at the Bosphorus castles soon affected Istanbul, and all the people of Istanbul gathered together with the Janissaries at the streets and Et Square. Ebubekir Efendi in his journal that there were nearly 80 thousand people together with the Janissaries at the square, and also states that more than half them were the ordinary people.<sup>52</sup> Rebels asked for the names of twelve reformist statesmen in advisory council, and also demanded their execution.<sup>53</sup> The reason for the desire of the people at the square for the execution of that specific twelve names was that the reform movement had been initiated by these individuals, and people thought that their poverty and distress difficulty was because of these reforms. After the execution of the twelve statesmen, whose names were given to Sultan, people wanted Selim III to descend the throne. Selim III had though the rebellion would continue and renounced the throne, and left his place to the Sultan Mustafa IV.<sup>54</sup> The rebellion had ended after the abdication of Selim III, and also the reform movements came to an end with the end of Nizam-ı Cedid Corps.<sup>55</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The reign of Selim III was a turning point for the Ottoman Empire. Until the end of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire did not pay attention the innovation in Europe. As a result of the scientific development in Europe, the European countries became the most powerful and developed countries in the world and they began to colonizes in different part of the world. While European countries engaged these developments, the Ottoman Empire still thought it was one of the most powerful countries. This kind of belief was so effective among the Ottoman officers that the Ottoman Empire did not have permanent ambassadors in foreign countries. Towards the second half of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman statesmen and sultans realized the situation of the empire and they initiated many reform movements in the field of the military. Their reform movements stayed limited by the reformers, and their successors did not engage in the same efforts to follow their predecessors. Unlike other sultans, Selim III realized that the Empire fell behind its rivals, the European states, and he therefore initiated a series of radical reforms. The initiation of the reforms made him known as the first reformist sultan of the Empire. Selim III realized that to accomplish these reforms, they should cover all institutions of government. Therefore, he established a new, modern army that was created according to the European army style. He also opened modern schools. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire political system was also outmoded. Sultan Selim III also established the first permanent embassies in some European countries such as France, in Britain and Spain.

However, the reform movement that was initiated by Selim III did not push the empire the level of the European countries because the reform movement failed. After the initiating of reform movements, Selim III announced the establishment of a new treasury to meet expenses of the reform movements and the new army. After a short period of time, the inexperienced reformist statesmen became corrupt and engaged to increase their own wealth. To do

<sup>48</sup> Beydilli, " III Selim," s,63.

<sup>49</sup> George Oğulukyan Ruznamesi, 1806–1810 İsyancıları III. Selim, IV. Mustafa, II. Mahmud ve Alemdâr Mustafa Paşa, İstanbul 1972, s. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Ahmet Rasim, Osmanlı'da Batışın Üç Evresi, s,88.

<sup>51</sup> Kusmani, Asiler ve Gaziler, s,80.

<sup>52</sup> Kusmani, Asiler ve Gaziler, s. 82.

<sup>53</sup> Oğulukyan Ruznamesi, s. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Stanford J. Shaw & Ezel Kural Shaw, History of The Ottoman Empire And Modern Turkey Volume II: Reform, Revolution, And Republic: The Rise Of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975, Cambridge University Press, 1977, s. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Kusmani, Asiler ve Gaziler, s. 82-85.



that they began to use many that collected in the new treasury for their own interest. The opponents of the reform movement among the statesmen, Ulema and the old army members started to provoked the people for the uprising. Even though the behavior of the reformist statesmen did not escape from the people's attention, people did not see enough reason for the uprising. While these events were happening inside the empire, the war between the Ottoman Empire, Russia and Great Britain led to loss in people' confidence against the reign of Selim III. As result of this war, the Russian troops invaded Wallachia and Moldavia. The food supply of the capital city depended on these two territories and this event caused food scarcity in Istanbul and increased the food prices. In addition, because of the war the British navy came in front the city and took the city under the siege for ten days. After happening of this event people started to their complaint s loudly. The Kabakci Mustafa revolt became an opportunity for people to overthrow the Sultan. When uprising started, thousands of people came together on the streets and they executed firstly reformist statesmen and forced the sultan to give up his place. Therefore, Selim III gave up his place to his cousin Mustafa IV. The Kabakci Mustafa leaves many questions that need answers. When the uprising started, Selim III had the power to suppress the rebellion by using Nizam-ı Cedid army but instead of using the new army, he preferred to obey rebels' request, which caused the end of his reign.

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