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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER  
AFASES 2011  
Brasov, 26-28 May 2011

## **NEW DOCUMENTS REGARDING THE SPREAD OUT OF THE ENGLISH TRADE INTO THE OTTOMAN DOMAINS: THE MEMORANDUM OF THE BOARD OF TRADE, LONDON, 1828**

**Nilgün İSMAIL, Lecturer, Ph.D. in Ottoman Studies**

The Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

### **Abstract**

*The papers in my hands contain a memorandum drawn up by the Board of Trade, London, 1828. The memorandum describes the discontinuous trade practiced in 1825 by the Levant Company and the decisions drawn up by the representatives of decision makers of English government to enlarge English commerce and to open new markets inside the Ottoman domains.*

**Keywords:** *Foreign Office, Levant Company, memorandum, Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, Ottoman maritime trade, English trade, Ottoman domains*

### **1. GENERAL VIEW REGARDING THE ATTITUDE OF FOREIGN OFFICE IN LEVENT IN LATE 18 CENTURY**

In 1793 the out break of war with France produced a prolonged fall of the Levant Company trade. That was the beginning of acts of warfare that made the passage through the Mediterranean a dangerous space for merchant ships and brought to the withdrawal of the English fleet from the Mediterranean and for two years no protection could be given to English merchants sailing in the Mediterranean Sea.

The English vessels trading to the Levant as a consequent of danger and of high rate of insurance of their cargoes suspended the import of goods that usually were brought from the Levant in English ships or in vessels belonging to a friendly nation.

In 1794 the Levant Company applied to the government for help and from then until 1802, with the exception of 1795, the Company received an annual subsidy to support its expenses.

After Napoleon's expedition in Egypt in 1798 trade in Levant was once more possible, as there was a demand for English goods needed by the Ottomans to equip their armies.

The unexpected attack of France upon an Ottoman province led to a treaty of alliance between England and the Porte in 1799 and that was the first treaty made between England and the Ottoman Empire and made them close partners in a common struggle against France, and it brought the dependence of the Ottoman Empire upon its ally for help in naval defense, supplies and military aid [1].

## 2. TRADE IN THE BLACK SEA AFTER THE TREATY OF KÜÇÜK-KAYNARCA

The whole situation allowed the English Levant merchants to acquire from the Porte the long-forbidden right to enter and navigate in the Black Sea.

The first break in the strict control of trade of the inland sea came after the Treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca in 1774 when the Ottoman Empire was obliged to allow Russia to navigate and trade in the Black Sea with its own ships [2].

The crisis with Russia over Ochakov in 1791 promoted that the government was awakening to the interest that England had to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The maintenance and defense of the Ottoman Empire was essential in keeping the British Empire that was rapidly expanding in India.

The English ambassador at Constantinople got a new significance as the look-out upon the connection which linked the kingdom to her eastern domains.

The Peace of Jassy in 1792, which carried the Russian frontier to the River Dniester gave the opportunity to tsarina Catherine to obtain from the Porte the permission to all foreign merchants trading or settling in any of the ports of her territory on the Black Sea. That was the opportunity for the English Levant merchants to get from the Porte the permission for the English flag to enter the Black Sea.

Until 1799 no progress was made towards that direction when Spencer Smith, who represented the Levant Company at Constantinople, was authorized to obtain the privilege and the permission given by the Porte to England in proof of her friendly assistance to enter and trade into the waters of Black Sea [3].

The promise was postponed until 1802 when England gained the right to pass through the Straits and English merchants could trade in the ports and territory of the Black Sea and deal a direct trade with Russia. The Ottoman government gave permission to non-Muslim merchants to sail the Black Sea and trade in its ports and settlements but it gave a great

importance to the export of banned goods such as, olive oil, soap, coffee and ammunition.

Corn, tallow and timber were the chief articles in which the English merchants traded from the Black Sea region.

In 1809 after the war (1806) between Ottoman Empire and Russia, England gave assistance to Ottoman Empire, and there was a written agreement in Kal'a-i Sultaniye according to which England was entitled to support the Ottoman Empire [4].

## 3. THE CEASE OF THE LEVANT COMPANY'S ACTIVITY

As England's diplomatic interests at Constantinople increased it led to political importance of the English embassy to the Porte. The English ambassador to the Porte, who once was a commercial agent it was transformed into an important person who could intervene in European politics [5].

In May 1825 the foreign secretary, George Canning, communicated that the Company's authority passed to the crown and the Levant Company activity ceased to be.

The Company's activity influenced the introduction of cotton and then it laid the foundations of the Lancashire cotton industry, coffee was introduced onto England and former luxuries commodities became so plentiful that they were transformed into necessities [6].

The cease of the Levant Company's activity opened new markets for Levant merchants on the Black Sea ports and settlements and that led at the end of many consulship's activity at the Mediterranean Sea as it was mentioned in the letter dated Dec., 10<sup>th</sup>, 1828, London and signed by twenty one leading members of the Levant Company *We, the Undersigned, having had, as leading Members of the late Levant Company, opportunities of judging of the qualifications of Mr. Richard Brant, strongly recommend his as a most prosper and fit person to be appointed to fill any Consulship that may become vacant in any Port of Turkey or Greece, and We feel convinced that, if so employed, Mr. Brant would from the*



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*experience he has acquired of the Customs and Commercial usages in the Levant, fulfill the duties of his office with credit to himself, and to the entire satisfaction of His Majesty's Government [7].*

The increasing power of the state in wealth and executive power showed the way to establish government's control both over the ambassador but also over the other representatives and commercial agents in the Levant.

#### 4. THE MEMORANDUM OF THE BOARD OF TRADE, 1828

Later events showed that the work of Levant Company from the political point of view was complementary and it led to the establishment of a connection with the Ottoman Empire which became indispensable both for geographical and commercial aspect for maintenance of English power in the East. The Ottoman Empire was the key to India and English interest and intervention to support the Porte increased due to English commitments to East as proved by the Memorandum written by The Board of Trade in London and dated 1828 "...to look into the state of our Commercial Relations generally with Asiatic Turkey. In the present state of their Country and the World not to say how important is to seize every possible occasion to extend the employment of our capital and Shipping..."[8]

There was mentioned the importance for the Board of Trade to use any mercantile opportunity, to extend the commercial limits and to look for new markets, new channels of distribution,.....*The Board of Trade is especially called upon anxiously to explore any openings that may present themselves for mercantile Enterprise: to watch for means of*

*enlarging our Commerce, to point out opportunities which might otherwise be unnoticed, by judicious measures the attempts of skill and capital in new channels..."[9]*

The Board of Trade underlined the main geographical area of the Ottoman Empire where English commodities did not entered the markets"...countries which compose the chief and most valuable portion of Asiatic Turkey – all that region, bounded by the Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Seas, is now literally without the pale of British Commerce..."[10]

The Memorandum gave information and details about the region, countries, population, religion and there was mention the fact that England had less commercial activity in the area"...*These countries are Caramanian or the Eastern half of Asia Minor – Armenia – Syria – Diarbekiz – and Kurdistan. They contain a population of at least nine million, of which great population is Christian. They offer every facility of advantage to Commerce with England. The Levant Company maintained some hold, a very imperfect and inadequate one. Since the dissolution of the Company even that position has been relinquished: Smyrna and Beyrood are the only points which we retain..."[11].*

As it was underlined in text of the above mentioned Memorandum, England encouraged her merchants to enter new markets and among these regions was the Black Sea.

The events between Greek rebellion in 1821 and the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829 changed the Ottomans political position. According to the treaty of Adrianople, the Black Sea was opened to navigation for the merchant ships of all countries. The non-Muslim merchants got *ruhsat*, an authorization to trade in the Black Sea ports and an *izn-i*

*sefine*, a permission given to foreign ships to sail and trade in the Black Sea [12]

As a conclusion after Russia gained the right to trade on her own ships, as stipulated by the article 11 of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, the other states England, France and other small European countries[13] were allowed to sail and trade in the Black Sea.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

One of the most important consequence of the memorandum was the settlement of the first English consulship representative at Bucharest and that established the first step towards Lord Palmerston's view regarding Britain's policy: the Russian danger and the support for the Porte against Russia.

That was the context in which the Anglo-Ottoman commercial agreement was negotiated in 1838 – a context of political and strategic considerations, and also with economic considerations.

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