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THE CAREER OF AN OTTOMAN BUREAUCRAT OF ALBANIAN ORIGIN IN THE AGE OF NATIONALISM IN THE BALKANS: MAHMUD BEDRİ BEY*

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ABSTRACT: *The article examines the attitude of Mahmud Bedri Bey, an Ottoman citizen of Albanian origin, during his civil service and parliamentary career in the period when nationalist movements began to gain political power among the Albanians in the Ottoman Empire. Mahmud Bedri Bey was an Albanian-origin Ottoman who did not favor the establishment of an Albanian state, but took a stance in favor of the continuation of Ottoman unity. The article reveals the details of this Ottoman bureaucrat's preference for Ottoman political unity at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, a period that was marked by nationalist movements among the Ottoman Albanians. The primary sources for this research are Ottoman archival documents and the reports of the Parliament of Deputies; qualitative research and document analysis have been utilized to analyze the information therein.*

KEYWORDS: *Mahmud Bedri Bey, Albania, Ministry of Post and Telegraph, Sultan Abdülhamid II, Second Constitutional Monarchy.*

LA CARRIERA DI UN BUROCRATO OTTOMANO DI ORIGINE ALBANESE NELL'ERA DEL NAZIONALISMO NEI BALCANI: MAHMUD BEDRİ BEY

SOMMARIO: *L'articolo esamina l'atteggiamento di Mahmud Bedri Bey, cittadino ottomano di origine albanese, durante il suo servizio civile e la sua carriera parlamentare nel periodo in cui i movimenti nazionalisti cominciarono a conquistare il potere politico tra gli albanesi nell'Impero Ottomano. Mahmud Bedri Bey era un ottomano di origine albanese che non era favorevole alla creazione di uno stato albanese, ma prese posizione a favore della continuazione dell'unità ottomana. L'articolo rivela i dettagli della preferenza di questo burocrate ottomano per l'unità politica ottomana alla fine del XIX e all'inizio del XX secolo, un periodo segnato da movimenti nazionalisti tra gli albanesi ottomani. Le fonti primarie di questa ricerca sono i documenti d'archivio ottomani e i rapporti del Parlamento dei Deputati; la ricerca qualitativa e l'analisi dei documenti sono state utilizzate per analizzare le informazioni in essi contenute.*

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Mahmud Bedri Bey, Albania, Ministero delle Poste e del Telegrafo, Sultano Abdülhamid II, Seconda Monarchia Costituzionale.*

* Abbreviations: Boa (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives Ottoman Archives); Beo (Record Office of the Sublime Porte); Dh.Mkt (Ministry of Internal Affairs. Secretary); Dh.Mui (Ministry of Internal Affairs. Administration of General Communication); Dh.Saidd (Ministry of Internal Affairs. Registers); Dh.Şfr (Ministry of Internal Affairs. Code Registry); Hsdtfr1 (Purchased Document Rumelian Inspectorate); İ.Azn (Imperial Decrees. Court of law and Sects); İ.Dh (Imperial Decrees. Internal Affairs); İ.Hus (Imperial Decrees. Private); İ.Ml (Imperial Decrees. Revenue); İ.Pt (Imperial Decrees. Telegraph and Post); İ.Tal (Imperial Decrees. Rewards); İ.Tks (Imperial Decrees. Retirement Fund); Şd (Council of State); Y.Mtv (Yıldız Palace. Diversified Petitions); Y.Prk.Ask (Yıldız Palace. Military Petitions); Y.Prk.Şd (Yıldız Palace. Council of State Petitions); Mmzc (Official Records of the Parliament of Deputies of the Ottoman State); H: Hijri calendar; M: Gregorian calendar; R: Julian calendar.

1. Introduction

The Balkans is a region that embodies diversity of state, ruler, ethnicity, religion, sect etc. due to its location and has experienced periods of peace in the past known as Pax Romana and Pax Ottomana. The term Balkanization started to be used by 19th century geographers and entails a negative connotation which refers to the compartmentalization of a region into smaller and often hostile regions. Instead of the Balkans, the term Southeast Europe is also an indicator of the understanding of accentuating differences¹. These characteristics can create both positive and negative perceptions.

During the first centuries of its existence, the Ottoman Empire developed and strengthened with an understanding of governance that could accommodate peoples of different ethnic origins, religions or sects. In the 19th century, a transition process was experienced and differences became antagonistic in accordance with the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of the period. The indicators of this transition process were felt earliest and most clearly in the Balkans. The Ottoman Empire was active in many fields during this time from politics to economy in different parts of the Balkans, and similarly, Ottoman Albanians started to become involved in nationalist movements. These kind of movements increased their influence among Albanians who thought that the decisions taken at the Berlin Congress (1878) ignored the Albanian identity in the face of other Balkan nationalisms², and efforts to emphasize the Albanian identity in areas such as language, culture, literature, and politics intensified³ within and outside the borders of the Ottoman Empire. For example, the anthropological studies of the region in the 1900s by British Mary Edith Durham gained a political character⁴. It was not difficult to find economic, political, and cultural reasons for this rupture in nationalist character. At the same time, the negative perception of Albanians in the Ottoman Empire as early as the 18th century can be considered as additional drive towards efforts to secede from the empire⁵.

In the 20th century, similarly to the beginning of Ottoman rule, there were Albanians who favored Ottoman unity for political,

¹ A. Hilaj, *The Albanian National Question and the Myth of Greater Albania*, «Journal of Slavic Military Studies», 26 (2013), p. 394.

² H. Saygılı, *20. Yüzyılın Başlangıcından Günümüze Arnavutlarda Osmanlı ve Türkiye Algısı*, «Bilge Strateji», 6, 10 (2014), p. 36.

³ N. Bozboru, *Osmanlı Yönetiminde Arnavutluk ve Arnavut Ulusçuluğu'nun Gelişimi*, Boyut Kitapları, İstanbul, 1997.

⁴ M.E. Durham, *High Albania*, Edward Arnold, London, 1909.

⁵ U. Bayraktar, *Bir Terim Olarak "Arnavut": 18. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Düşüncesinde Arnavutlar*, «Balkan Araştırma Enstitüsü Dergisi», 11, 1 (2022), pp. 1-38.

economic, religious, and cultural reasons. As a result of their effect, Albanians were the last ethnic group in the Ottoman Balkans to break away from the Ottoman Empire and establish their own national state. It would be incomplete to explain this with the cultural similarities, such as religion or language, of a significant part of the Ottoman Albanians with those in the Ottoman central administration. This is because the perception of culture in the Ottoman period before the age of nationalism was different from the understanding of cultural hybridity in the era of globalization⁶.

Many statesmen, soldiers, thinkers, and literary figures of Albanian origin were raised in the Ottoman Empire in various fields from politics to literature. Among the figures for whom the most information is available are Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, İsmail Kemal Bey, Süreyya Bey (from Vlora), İbrahim Temo, Esad Toptani, Ferid Pasha (from Vlora), the Frashëri brothers (Naim, Abdül, and Şemseddin Sami), Niyazi Bey (from Resen), and Mehmet Akif Ersoy. Mahmud Bedri Bey's name is mentioned differently in the records of the period; he appears as Mahmud Bedri Bey, Bedri Efendi, Arnavud Bedri, and Bedri Bey⁷. Compared to other Albanian-origin Ottomans such as Ferid Pasha, Grandvizier from 1903 to 1908⁸, there is not as much detailed information about Mahmud Bedri Bey. However, as an Ottoman civil servant, bureaucrat, and parliamentarian of Albanian origin who embraced the concept of Ottomanism at a time when the state and society were undergoing significant transformation, more information about him needs to be uncovered.

2. Mahmud Bedri Bey's family and education

Mahmud Bedri Bey was born in Niš, a city currently in southern Serbia, in 1844. His father was Mehmet Reşit Ağa from Belgrade⁹. Mahmud Bedri Bey's son Mazhar Ali Bey was also an Ottoman bureaucrat who served as a governor in different cities of the Ottoman Empire¹⁰. Apart from the above information, the only document about Mahmud Bedri Bey's family in archival records relates to the medals

⁶ P. Burke, *Kültürel Melezlik*, trans. by M.Topal, Asur yayınları, İstanbul, 2011, pp. 7-11.

⁷ The name Mahmud Bedri Bey will be used in the rest of the text.

⁸ A. Kırmızı, *Experiencing the Ottoman Empire as a Life Course Ferid Pasha, Governor and Grandvizier (1851-1914)*, «Geschichte und Gesellschaft», 40 (2014), pp. 42-66.

⁹ Boa, Y..Mtv., 116/104, H. 21.09.1312 (M. March 18, 1895).

¹⁰ S. Küneralp, *Son Dönem Osmanlı Erkân ve Ricali (1839-1922) Prosopografik Rehber*, İSİS, İstanbul, 1999, p. 63.

given to his wife and daughter-in-law in 1909¹¹. Mahmud Bedri Bey graduated from Rüşdiye (a secular Ottoman school), and in addition to Albanian he could write in Turkish and speak Bulgarian¹².

3. Mahmud Bedri Bey's professional life before the Second Constitutional Monarchy

Mahmud Bedri Bey's professional life can be divided into two periods: his tenure as a civil servant before the declaration of the Second Constitutional Monarchy in 1908, and afterwards, as a parliamentarian. He started his career as a customs officer in Niš and later, worked for the Ministry of Post and Telegraph before becoming a member of parliament for Peja, which was known as İpek in the Ottoman period and today is a city in Kosovo. He also served as a member of different institutions such as the Ministry of Post and Telegraph, Finance Council.

The Ottoman Tanzimat period (1839-1876) is important in terms of the distinction between the professions of the educated and non-educated. Since the institutional transformation that would train the employees of the Post and Telegraph Directorate began after Mahmud Bedri Bey's entry into the profession¹³, he belonged to the non-educated group in the first period of his working life. Being an Ottoman bureaucrat of Albanian origin and a non-educated Ottoman civil servant were characteristics of Mahmud Bedri Bey as an individual and, at the same time, exemplified his period which was a transitional one. In this sense, Mahmud Bedri Bey was known by each identity but not owned by either, i.e., neither by the Ottoman identity nor the Albanian one.

4. An Ottoman official from Niš to Aleppo (1862-1895)

In 1862, at the age of 19, Mahmud Bedri Bey started working at the Niš Tax Administration and three years later became an apprentice at the Niš Telegraph Office. He changed his position 23 times during

¹¹ Boa, İ..Tal., 207/73, H.22.12.1317 (M. April 23, 1909).

¹² Boa, Dh.Saidd..., 2/308, H.29.12.1259 (M. January 20, 1844).

¹³ B. Ata, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Döneminde Telgrafçılar Nasıl Yetiştirildi?*, in C. Öztürk, İ. Fındıkçı (ed.), *Prof.Dr. Yahya Akyüz'e Armağan Türk Eğitim Tarihi Araştırmaları, Eğitim ve Kültür Yazıları*, Pegem Akademi, Ankara, 2011, pp. 284-295.

his 33 years and six months of civil service between 1862 and 1895¹⁴. The only exceptions in this process were in 1877 when he was in the inspectorate of Niš and Sofia and he came to İstanbul due to the seizure of the region by the Russians, and three months after his appointment to the inspectorate of Karaağaç with the same salary when he was inoperative for 1.5 months due to the abolition of this inspectorate¹⁵.

Tab. I – Mahmud Bedri Bey's duties between 1862 and 1895

	Position/Place of Duty	Period of Duty	Duration (months)	Salary (kuruş)
1	Niš Tax Chief Clerk's Office	August 14, 1862 – June 14, 1865	34	100
2	Apprentice/Niš Telegraph Office	June 14, 1865 – January 26, 1868	31	0
3	Accountant/Niš Telegraph Office	January 26, 1868 – August 13, 1870	31	480
4	Accountant/Plovdiv Telegraph Office	August 13, 1870 – March 28, 1872	19	480
5	Officer/Gorna Dzaumaja Telegraph Office	March 28, 1872 – May 14, 1873	14	570
6	Accountant/Plovdiv Telegraph Office	May 14, 1873 – July 14, 1873	2	455
7	Accountant/Edirne Telegraph Office	July 14, 1873 – September 14, 1873	2	455
8	Leskovac Telegraph Directorate	September 14, 1873 – October 14, 1873	1	700
9	Thessaloniki Inspector Clerk's Office	October 14, 1873 – January 05, 1874	2	800
10	Bosnia Telegraph Directorate	January 05, 1874 – June 13, 1875	17	1,050
11	Skopje Telegraph Directorate	June 13, 1875 – July 13, 1875	1	1,140
12	Skopje Telegraph Directorate	July 13, 1875 – January 12, 1877	18	900
13	Skopje Telegraph Directorate	January 12, 1877 – November 13, 1877	10	1,200
14	Niš Telegraph Directorate	November 13, 1877 – December 13, 1877	1	1,200
15	Niš and Sofia Telegraph Inspectorate	December 13, 1877 – February 04, 1878	2	1,750
16	Karaağaç Telegraph Inspectorate	February 04, 1878 – May 03, 1878	3	1,750
17	Inoperative	May 03, 1878 – June 16, 1878	1,5	0
18	İzmir Telegraph Directorate	June 16, 1878 – May 15, 1879	9	1,250

¹⁴ Boa, Y..Mtv., 116/104, H.21.09.1312 (M. March 18, 1895).

¹⁵ Boa, Dh.Saidd..., 2/308, H. 29.12.1259 (M. January 20, 1844).

19	Ankara Telegraph Directorate	May 15, 1879 – April 14, 1881	23	1,300
20	Ankara Telegraph Chief Inspectorate	April 14, 1881 – October 05, 1883	30	2,000
21	Diyarbakır Telegraph Chief Directorate	October 05, 1883 – January 13, 1885	15	2,400
22	Bozkır	January 13, 1885 – December 26, 1886	23	3,000
23	Aleppo Telegraph Chief Directorate	December 26, 1886 – October 13, 1892	70	3,000
24	Aleppo Telegraph Chief Directorate	October 13, 1892 – February 14, 1895	28	3,500

Mahmud Bedri Bey's career as a civil servant progressed with promotions. Especially from the 1880s onwards, his progress is confirmed by the promotions and medals he received. In January 1883, he was promoted to the rank of inspector of the Ankara and Sivas Post and Telegraph¹⁶. His appointment in 1886 to the duty left vacant by the death of Ahmet Efendi, the chief director of the Post and Telegraph in Aleppo Province, was also a kind of promotion¹⁷. Some of the documents on promotion requests and the outcomes of these requests for the years 1891, 1892, and 1895 reveal Mahmud Bedri Bey's efforts and achievements in his civil service during this period¹⁸.

In the 19th century, the deterioration of the economic system in the Ottoman Empire led to more complex and long-term problems in duties dealing with cash transactions. The Ministry of Post and Telegraph was one of the institutions where such incidents occurred frequently. There were many examples where personal problems between civil servants became entangled with state affairs – a situation that Mahmud Bedri Bey also struggled with. In addition to positive developments such as promotion and medals, there were also negative statements about Mahmud Bedri Bey's civil service. One such statement belongs to Karçınzade Süleyman Şükrü who was appointed to Pozantı (Adana) in 1887 and who claimed that Mahmud Bedri Bey, the chief director of Aleppo at the time, was engaged in illegitimate activities and took bribes¹⁹. Sometimes, such disputes led to denunciations or slander between state officials. Official correspondence reflects

¹⁶ Boa, İ.Dh., 874/69763, H.13.03.1300 (M. January 22, 1883).

¹⁷ Boa, Dh.Mkt., 1378/102, H.19.02.1304 (M. November 17, 1886).

¹⁸ Boa, Dh.Mkt., 1875/79, H.04.03.1309 (M. October 8, 1891); Boa, Beo., 1/74, H.13.10.1309 (M. May 11, 1892); Boa, Dh.Mkt., 1993/15, H. 04.02.1310 (M. August 28, 1892); Boa, Dh.Mkt., 2018/69, H.17.04.1310 (M. November 8, 1892).

¹⁹ İ.H. Göksoy, *Eğirdirli Seyyah Karçınzade Süleyman Şükrü: Hayatı, Seyhahati ve Eserleri*, «Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi», 39, 2 (2017), p.14.

such problems experienced or allegedly experienced in dealings with Mahmud Bedri Bey. In 1895, there were allegations that Mahmud Bedri Bey was communicating secretly with the consuls. In this process, the replacement of Aleppo Postmaster İskender Efendi and Aleppo Post and Telegraph Chief Director Mahmud Bedri Bey came to the fore²⁰. When the incident was reported to the Ministry of Post and Telegraph by the Aleppo Province, the expression «Mahmud Bedri Bey's unruly and inappropriate behavior»²¹ was used. Developments led Mahmud Bedri Bey to leave for İstanbul on February 12, 1895²²; he requested an increase in his salary and his appointment as an administrative member of the Ministry of Post and Telegraph. He also wrote to the relevant authorities that such a stigma on his reputation was unacceptable²³. Mahmud Bedri Bey requested the investigation to be transferred from the Ministry of Post and Telegraph to the Council of State, for a just decision to be made, and for his record to be cleared²⁴. As a result of the investigation, it was decided that there was no evidence that Mahmud Bedri Bey had transmitted news to the consulates. According to the response received from the Interior Department of the Council of State, it was decided to issue warnings to the Aleppo Province after the Ministry of Post and Telegraph did not deem it necessary to investigate Mahmud Bedri Bey²⁵. On June 12, 1895, Mahmud Bedri Bey petitioned to leave the duty of chief director of Post and Telegraph in Aleppo²⁶. On September 10, 1895, he was promoted to the Post Office Directorate with a salary of chief director in order to benefit from his presence in İstanbul due to his good conduct and actions²⁷. Both before and after this promotion, he was promoted several other times as well²⁸.

In the end, Mahmud Bedri Bey was not found guilty of any crime and it was reported that there was no need for a different method in examining the mail coming to Aleppo Province²⁹. It was decided that Mahmud Bedri Bey was to be reinstated. Meanwhile, it was reported that Mahmud Bedri Bey was appointed to the position vacated by the

²⁰ *Boa, Beo.*, 556/41653, H.24.7.1312 (M. January 21, 1895); *Boa, Beo.*, 561/42028, H.02.08.1312 (M. January 29, 1895).

²¹ *Boa, Dh.Mkt.*, 339/76, H.07.08.1312 (M. February 3, 1895).

²² *Boa, Y..Prk.Ask.*, 103/49, H.16.8.1312 (M. February 12, 1895).

²³ *Boa, Dh.Mkt.*, 363/50, H.20.10.1312 (M. April 16, 1895).

²⁴ *Boa, Şd.*, 2968/76, H.04.11.1312 (M. April 29, 1895).

²⁵ *Boa, Dh.Mkt.*, 363/50, H.20.10.1312 (M. April 16, 1895).

²⁶ *Boa, Şd.*, 2656/38, H.16.02.1313 (M. August 8, 1895).

²⁷ *Boa, Dh.Mkt.*, 425/53, H.20.03.1313 (M. September 10, 1895).

²⁸ *Boa, Dh.Mkt.*, 216/26, H.07.09.1311 (M. March 14, 1894); *Boa, İ..Tal.*, 177/48, H.11.01.1317 (M. May 22, 1899).

²⁹ *Boa, Dh.Mkt.*, 429/16, H.26.03.1313 (M. September 16, 1895).

death of Zühdü Bey, the director of Telegraph Office of Goods, and that a suitable person should be appointed in his place³⁰. In September 1895, it was requested that Mahmud Bedri Bey be appointed as governor of Peja³¹; the reasons given were that Mustafa Naili Efendi, the governor of Peja, was in Thessaloniki and the public order incidents in Gjakova (Yakova) district of Peja required attention³². However, this request was not realized³³.

5. Mahmud Bedri Bey's services in İstanbul

After the investigation during his tenure at the Aleppo Post and Telegraph Head Office, a new era began in Mahmud Bedri Bey's civil service life. In October 1896, since the investigation into Nurettin Efendi, an accountant of the Ministry of Post and Telegraph, had not yet been completed, it was decided that Mahmud Bedri Bey would be appointed to this position³⁴. The gold Medal of Merit he received during his long tenure as a Ministry accountant was another positive development in his professional life³⁵; however, there were those who had negative opinions about him even after he came to İstanbul. Mehmed Salahi Bey, who held various civil servant positions during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II and worked as a civil servant in the Ministry of Post and Telegraph in the 1890s³⁶, was one of them. Mahmud Bedri Bey might have been more vulnerable to such accusations as his positions involved cash transactions and, therefore, were open to abuse, or perhaps the accusations were a reflection of the political instability. Süleyman Şükrü Bey's opinions about Mahmud Bedri Bey who was an accountant of the Ministry of Post and Telegraph in İstanbul in 1897 were similar to the accusations expressed in Aleppo³⁷. At the end of 1897, there was a denunciation against four people, including Reşad Efendi, the head of the Council of Ministry of Post and

³⁰ Boa, Dh.Mkt., 435/21, H.08.04.1313 (M. September 28, 1895).

³¹ Boa, Dh.Şfr., 180/43, R. 07.07.1311 (M. September 19, 1895).

³² Boa, Dh.Şfr., 181/32, R.23.07.1311 (M. October 5, 1895).

³³ BOA, Y.Prk.Ask., 102/80, H.30.07.1312 (M. January 27, 1895); *Salname-i Devlet-i Ali-yi Osman*, Matbaa-i Âmire, Dersaadet, 1895; *Salname-i Devlet-i Ali-yi Osman*, Matbaa-i Âmire, Dersaadet, 1896; *Salname-i Vilâyet-i Kosova*, Vilâyet matbaası, Üsküp, 1896.

³⁴ Boa, İ.Pt., 6/58, H.26.05.1314 (M. November 2, 1896).

³⁵ Boa, İ.Tal., 253/97, H.27.03.1319 (M. July 14, 1901).

³⁶ M. Aktepe, *Mehmed Salâhi Bey ve Mecmuâsı'ndan Bâzı Notlar*, «Tarih Dergisi», (1969), pp. 55-67.

³⁷ İ.H. Göksoy, *Eğirdirli Seyyah Karçınzade Süleyman Şükrü: Hayatı, Seyahati ve Eserleri* cit., 18.

Telegraph, and Mahmud Bedri Bey, on the grounds of selling stolen stamps as is stated in the archival document³⁸. This denunciation was not based on a new incident. In May 1896, during Reşad Bey's tenure as chief postmaster general of İzmir, there was a report that several thousand liras' worth of old postage stamps were sold to foreigners³⁹.

During his tenure as a civil servant in İstanbul, Mahmud Bedri Bey maintained his ties with his homeland and invested in educational and religious institutions in the region. In 1900, the construction of a mosque and a school for the Muslim Gashi tribe living in the district of Osojë of the Peja sanjak was on his agenda, the expenses of which were to be covered by him. It was stated that the district's cemetery to be enclosed by a wall and the school and mosque be named of Sultan Abdülhamid II by the Imperial Decree⁴⁰. The statesmen in the Ottoman Empire attached importance to investments in their homelands during their tenure. Mahmud Bedri Bey's undertaking such an investment while he was still an accountant of the Ministry of Post and Telegraph is an example of this. However, the fact that an investigation was on-going against him during the same period should not be overlooked.

In October 1900, it was decided that Mahmud Bedri Bey, an accountant of the Ministry of Post and Telegraph at the time, did not need to be dismissed from his job due to the aforementioned issue regarding the sale of stamps to foreigners, and it was deemed appropriate to wait for the results of the investigation and take action accordingly⁴¹. The fact that the Grand Vizierate did not request an investigation be opened against Mahmud Bedri Bey on the grounds of theft was a positive development and can be interpreted as not being deemed necessary on the part of the authorities. The situation was in favor of Mahmud Bedri Bey; however, those in favor of the investigation applied to the sultan and in July 1901⁴², it was decided to dismiss Mahmud Bedri Bey due to his corruption in accounting affairs⁴³ and to appoint Ziya Bey, one of the financial inspectors of the Ministry, in his place⁴⁴. Two months later, in September 1901, Mahmud Bedri Bey, who was described as well-skilled in financial affairs, became a

³⁸ Boa, Beo, 1061/79533, H.05.08.1315 (M. December 30, 1897).

³⁹ Boa, Beo, 777/58274, H.27.11.1313 (M. May 10, 1896).

⁴⁰ Boa, İ.Hus., 84/75, H.24.05.1318 (M. September 19, 1900); Boa, Beo, 1552/116352, H.25.05.1318 (M. September 20, 1900); Boa, Dh.Mkt., 2407/54, H.30.05.1318 (M. September 25, 1900); Boa, Beo, 1561/117075, H.18.06.1318 (M. October 13, 1900).

⁴¹ Boa, Beo, 1562/117076, H.16.06.1318 (M. October 11, 1900).

⁴² Boa, Y.Prk.Şd., 3/4, H.04.07.1318 (M. October 28, 1900).

⁴³ Boa, Dh.Mkt., 2512/26, H.04.04.1319 (M. July 21, 1901).

⁴⁴ Boa, Dh.Mkt., 2512/87, H.05.04.1319 (M. July 22, 1901).

member of the Finance Council with a salary of 6,000 kuruş⁴⁵. This development requires a closer look as the fact that Mahmud Bedri Bey was handed a negative verdict regarding his professional conduct in one institution but was appointed to another salaried job in another institution can be considered as a weakness of the Ottoman bureaucracy. This pattern, in fact, continued. According to a letter dated April 5, 1904, it was stated that Mahmud Bedri Bey, who was assigned to an estate to be auctioned in Aleppo, abused his position by offering money for this estate before the auction and a decision was taken to prosecute him⁴⁶. Another judgment was issued in 1905, when he was still a member of the Finance Council, for allegedly assaulting Tatyos Efendi⁴⁷. In these and similar cases, the verdicts against Mahmud Bedri Bey and the fact that he was kept in the position he held at the time with positive statements about him show how the Ottoman bureaucracy functioned. The situation is characteristic of a period when personal preferences rather than state policy could be effective among decision-makers.

6. Mahmud Bedri Bey's professional life during the Second Constitutional Monarchy

The year 1908 is an important date of change for the Ottoman Empire as a whole and specifically for Ottoman bureaucracy. During the Second Constitutional Monarchy, efforts were made to base membership in the Parliament of Deputies on the concept of the Ottoman citizenship, not on identities based on ethnicity or sectarian differences. The Young Turks' slogan of brotherhood also required this. However, this understanding could not be maintained for long and especially in the Parliament of Deputies, ethnic differences began to be felt more and more astutely.

The period of change that began in July 1908 is also important for Mahmud Bedri Bey's professional life. In the first elections held after the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, Mahmud Bedri Bey was elected as a deputy from Peja. In total, there were 25 deputies of Albanian origin in the Ottoman Parliament⁴⁸ and these deputies disagreed on the political future of the Ottoman Empire. Just as there were pro- and anti-sultan sentiments among Albanians before

⁴⁵ Boa, İ.Ml., 46/67, H.02.06.1319 (M. September 16, 1901).

⁴⁶ Boa, Dh.Mkt., 2630/51, H.17.09.1326 (M. October 13, 1908).

⁴⁷ Boa, İ.Azn., 63/16, H.13.09.1323 (M. November 11, 1905).

⁴⁸ F. Ahmad, A.R. Dankwart, *İkinci Meşrutiyet Döneminde Meclisler: 1908-1918*, «Güney-Doğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi, 4-5 (1975-1976), p. 247.

1908⁴⁹, after 1908, there were those in favor of continued existence within the Ottoman Empire and those in favor of autonomy or independence. Among the Albanian-origin members of parliament who held these different views, İsmail Kemal Bey, for example, was one of the leaders of the anti-Ottoman struggle in Albania⁵⁰, while Mahmud Bedri Bey was one of the proponents of Ottoman unity.

A decision taken before the 1908 elections and only one month after the declaration of the Second Constitutional Monarchy is indicative of Mahmud Bedri Bey's place in the Ottoman bureaucracy. On August 23, 1908, upon the abolition of the Finance Council, to which he had been elected as a member in September 1894, it was decided to pay Mahmud Bedri Bey's salary until he was appointed to another civil service⁵¹. During this period, he was also given an investigation job: Mahmud Bedri Bey was appointed to examine the accounts of Selim Melhame Pasha⁵², one of the ministers of forestry and mines during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, who had increased his income considerably during his ministry period⁵³.

Denunciations and complaints against Mahmud Bedri Bey continued in this period. According to the decision of the Council of State dated September 18, 1908, in the report referring to the judgment taken in 1904 in Aleppo on the allegation of abuse of office regarding the real estate to be auctioned, it was decided to notify the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Finance regarding Mahmud Bedri Bey's failure to pay back 4,000 kuruş he had received because he had been in İstanbul for four years⁵⁴.

Despite the results of the parliamentary elections⁵⁵, Mahmud Bedri Bey's appointment as the deputy of Peja met objections on the grounds that a person who was under trial for bribery and slander could not be elected as a member of parliament according to the Code of Laws⁵⁶. However, the Presidency of the Assembly decided that the accusation of embezzlement against Mahmud Bedri Bey during his term as the

⁴⁹ M. Glenny, *Balkans Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers, 1804-1999*, Penguin Books. London, 2001, p. 154.

⁵⁰ İ.H. Birecikli, *Avlonyalı İsmail Kemal Beyin Osmanlı Meclis-i Mebusanı'nda Tokatlanması Hadisesi*, «SBARD», 18, 36 (2020), pp. 139-163; C. Telci, *İsmail Kemal Bey Hakkında Avusturya Devlet Arşivinde Bulunan Bir Mektup*, «Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi», 1 (1996), pp. 185-191.

⁵¹ Boa, Beo, 3381/253506, H.25.07.1326 (M. August 23, 1908).

⁵² E. Makzume, *Sultan II.Abdülhamid'in Hizmetinde Selim Melhame Paşa ve Ailesi*, MD basımevi, İstanbul, 2019, p. 14.

⁵³ Boa, Beo, 3381/253508, H.25.07.1326 (M. August 23, 1908).

⁵⁴ Boa, Dh.Mkt., 2630/51, H.17.09.1326 (M. October 13, 1908).

⁵⁵ Boa, Dh.Mkt., 2700/100, H.14.12.1326 (M. January 7, 1909).

⁵⁶ Boa, Dh.Mkt., 2686/74, H.25.11.1326 (M. December 19, 1908).

chief director of Post and Telegraph in Aleppo was groundless, and, therefore, his deputation was accepted⁵⁷. Having received 139 votes, Mahmud Bedri Bey's parliamentary seat was finalized on January 13, 1909⁵⁸.

7. Mahmud Bedri Bey's activities in parliament

During the Second Constitutional Monarchy, there were heated debates in the Parliament of Deputies. These debates were especially intensified by the parliamentarians who supported the Ottoman nations that had separated or were in the process of separation from the political sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, the deputies who did not support this process of separation prioritized addressing the political, economic, and social problems of the country. It is possible to understand Mahmud Bedri Bey's attitude in this process through the proposals he submitted and the comments he made in parliament during his term (1908-1912). His proposals were related both to the country's foreign and domestic problems. He submitted his first proposal on January 27, 1909 together with Ömer Şevki Bey, the deputy for Sivas. The proposal related to the security of the state and was about the documents of Gazi Ahmet Muhtar Pasha who had been appointed as the extraordinary commissioner of Egypt in 1885, which were seized by the Egyptian Court after his return to İstanbul in 1908⁵⁹. The seized record was a correspondence document pertaining to Aqaba and its vicinity during Gazi Ahmet Muhtar Pasha's governorship of Hejaz, which was very important for the security of the state. The proposal requesting that the relevant documents be taken and examined by a committee in the presence of Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Pasha was not accepted⁶⁰.

Mahmud Bedri Bey's second proposal was dated February 22, 1909 and was about the negative impact of the Reji Administration on the state treasury. During his term as a member of the Finance Council, Mahmud Bedri Bey had mentioned the problem in the 1906 budget of the Reji Administration and the damage caused to the state treasury by the Ottoman State Debt Administration (*Düyûn-u Umûmiyye*) and the Reji Administration, and had asked Mehmed Ziya Pasha, the minister of finance at the time, to provide an explanation. His suggestion

⁵⁷ Boa, Şd, 2779/4, H.24.08.1327 (M. September 10, 1909).

⁵⁸ Boa, Şd, 2779/4, H.24.08.1327 (M. September 10, 1909).

⁵⁹ R. Uçarol, *Gazi Ahmet Muhtar Paşa (1839-1919)*, «Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi», 13 (1996), p. 447.

⁶⁰ Mmzc, R.14.11.1324 (M. January 27, 1909), 19/2, pp. 360-363.

to discuss this issue, which he defined as a dispute, in the Finance Committee was accepted by the parliament⁶¹. As a different development from these, in June 1909, a petition was submitted for the retirement of Mahmud Bedri Bey as a former member of the abolished Finance Council, with a salary of 4,657 kuruş⁶².

On March 19, 1910, Arif İsmet Bey, Hasan Bey, and Mahmud Bedri Bey made a proposal about the tax levied on butchers for the animals they slaughtered. It was decided to refer this to the Committee of Bill in order to eliminate the hesitation in the implementation of the decision taken in the General Assembly dated August 7, 1909 regarding this tax⁶³.

Apart from his proposals, Mahmud Bedri Bey's attitude towards state affairs is also evident in his speeches in parliamentary sessions. On January 21, 1909, Mahmud Bedri Bey claimed that arbitrary expenditures were made in the purchases made during İzzet Pasha's ministry of the Hejaz Railroad and stated that the issue should be investigated by a committee consisting of experts in the field, not appointed by the Ministry of Finance or Court of Accounts. In the same session, he expressed his opinion in favor of the continuation of the customs imposed in order to maintain law and order in Yemen⁶⁴.

On March 8, 1909, Mahmud Bedri Bey, a member of the Budget Commission of the parliament⁶⁵, acknowledged that the Ministry of Post and Telegraph was in need of reform, but warned that a reduction in its budget would also affect the number of civil servants, and this could cause unrest. Mahmud Bedri Bey argued that postal affairs should not be neglected at a time when the establishment and concession of the telephone, which could rival the post, was on the agenda⁶⁶ and when efforts were being made to abolish European postal services, and emphasized the necessity of a post master general and telegraph manager general. He emphasized that the Postal Directorates that existed in important places such as Ioannina, Bitola, Thessaloniki, Ankara, Aleppo, Diyarbakır, and Adana should be spread throughout the country, and that there should be a Postal Directorate in every province. Mahmud Bedri Bey argued for the necessity of standardizing the salaries paid by the Ministry of Post and Telegraph and the presence of reserve sergeants and postmen in each head directorate. He stated

⁶¹ Mmzc, R.09.12.1324 (M. February 22, 1909), 33/2, pp. 774-775.

⁶² Boa, İ.Tks., 22/61, H.27.05.1327 (M. June 16, 1909).

⁶³ Mmzc, R.06.01.1326 (M. March 19, 1910), 57/1, pp. 227-228.

⁶⁴ Mmzc, R.08.11.1324 (M. January 21, 1909), 16/1, pp. 280-292.

⁶⁵ E. Tural, *Osmanlı Posta Bürokrasisi 1908-1914*, «Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi», 28, 46 (2009), p. 212.

⁶⁶ M. Malhut, *Meclis-i Mebusan'da İmtiyazlar Sorunu 1908-1914*, İlkim Ozon yayınları, Antalya, 2011, pp. 251-254.

that only under these conditions could the Ottoman Ministry of Post and Telegraph compete and be on par with its European counterparts. He cited the Egyptian case as an example of mail services that were on equal footing with European services⁶⁷.

Mahmud Bedri Bey's words regarding the law called the stray and persons from whom only evil is expected (*Serseri ve Mazanne-i Sui Eşhas Hakkında Kanun*) which was among the discussed topics of the parliament session dated March 31, 1909, thirteen days before the March 31 incident i.e. the rising against the new regime, are a detail that reflects Mahmud Bedri Bey's personality. «He who does not violate his honor cannot be a stray. Once he becomes a stray, he is a dishonorable man, [and] he needs effective measures»⁶⁸, stated Mahmud Bedri Bey. Despite the decision to lift the immunity of the Ottoman deputies of Albanian origin who were involved in the March 31 incident as instigators and refer them to the Court of War, Mahmud Bedri Bey's continued immunity clarifies his attitude in favor of Ottoman unity. The fact that Albanians who were still in cooperation with the Young Turks after 1910 were considered traitors by the Albanian nationalists⁶⁹ shows that Mahmud Bedri Bey was not part of the political wing of Albanian nationalism.

In the proposal dated February 2, 1910 and signed by Mahmud Bedri Bey, the problems that the Albanians who defended Ottoman unity and remained loyal to the Ottoman Empire had recently experienced regarding military recruitment were mentioned. The proposal emphasized that a similar problem concerned not only the Albanians but the whole country, and criticized the fact that the Albanians, who always took part voluntarily in the wars with the Greeks and generally participated in the defense of the homeland and the resumption of the regime of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, continued to be exposed to similar wrong practices as those of the previous administration⁷⁰.

8. Albanian alphabet debates and Mahmud Bedri Bey

Apart from his work in the parliament, Mahmud Bedri Bey took an active role in the alphabet discussions that started to gain importance among Albanians especially after 1878⁷¹. After the Second Constitu-

⁶⁷ Mmzc, R.23.12.1324 (M. March 8, 1909), 38/2, pp. 184-187.

⁶⁸ Mmzc, R.18.01.1325 (M. March 31, 1909), 50/1, p. 577.

⁶⁹ M. Aydın, *Arnavutluk'un Osmanlı Devleti'nden Kopuşu Sorunu (1912-1913)*, «Belgi», 17, 1 (2019), p. 1099.

⁷⁰ Mmzc, R.26.11.1325 (M. February 8, 1910), 37/1, p. 194.

⁷¹ G. Castellan, *Balkanların Tarihi*, trans. by A. Yaraman, Doğan Kitap, İstanbul, 1995, pp.374-375.

tional Monarchy, when the number of Albanians who were dissatisfied with the policies of the Unionists increased, alphabet discussions among Albanians gained momentum⁷². The Debre Congress (July 23-28, 1909), the Elbasan Education Congress (September 2, 1909)⁷³, and the Second Bitola Congress (1910) are examples of this process. Mahmud Bedri Bey's statements in these discussions demonstrate his conciliatory personality.

During the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, Mahmud Bedri Bey stated that, like some Albanian intellectuals, he could accept the preference of Latin letters to some extent for the continuation of the Albanian culture vis-à-vis other national cultures in the Balkans. However, after 1908, Mahmud Bedri Bey, like the Unionists, described the previous regime as despotism and defended the idea that giving up the Arabic letters would harm the Albanian culture and existence, and that Catholicism would spread rapidly, especially among children. Mahmud Bedri Bey was aware of the Albanian education discussions among Albanians in the 1890s after the Albanian alphabet created in 1825⁷⁴, and was the president of the temporary Board of Directors of the Ottoman Union Albanian Education Assembly (*İttihâd-i Osmânî Arnavud Maârif Mahfilî*). In the opening ceremony of this society on March 4, 1910, Mahmud Bedri Bey gave a speech as its president. After talking about the history of Albanians and their loyalty and usefulness to the Ottoman Empire, he expressed his views in favor of the Arabic alphabet⁷⁵.

The information about Mahmud Bedri Bey's participation in the Second Bitola Congress is contradictory: since the majority of the participants of the congress were against Latin letters, it was deemed unimportant whether Mahmud Bedri Bey would attend or not⁷⁶. Although it is stated that he took part in the 1910 Bitola Congress, Mahmud Bedri Bey's name is not included in the participant list of the Second Bitola Congress⁷⁷.

⁷² N. Bozborra, *Osmanlı Yönetiminde Arnavutluk ve Arnavut Ulusçuluğu'nun Gelişimi* cit., p. 269.

⁷³ E. Karakoç, M. Yavaş, *İkinci Meşrutiyet Döneminde Arnavutların Eğitim Çalışmalarında Önemli Bir Aşama: Elbasan Maarif Kongresi*, «Belleten», 82, 294 (2018), p. 683.

⁷⁴ F. Maden, *Arnavutluk'un Bağımsızlık Süreci (1877-1913)*, «Avrasya Etüdüleri», 39, 1 (2011), pp. 157-161.

⁷⁵ M. Yavaş, *İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi'nde İttihâd-i Osmânî Arnavud Maârif Mahfilinin Kuruluş ve Faaliyetleri*, «Anadolu ve Balkan Araştırmaları Dergisi», 5, 10 (2022), pp. 633-636.

⁷⁶ Boa, Hsdtrf1, 2/74, H.20.03.1328 (M. April 1, 1910).

⁷⁷ Boa, Dh.Mui., 102/3, H.07.06.1328 (M. June 16, 1910).

9. Mahmud Bedri Bey's last speeches in parliament

Mahmud Bedri Bey's last speeches in parliament date back to 1911 and regard issues concerning the country's development, economy, and independence. As part of the discussions on the draft law regarding the telephone network to be established in İstanbul and its surroundings, he stated that the telegraph would produce more efficient results than the telephone, especially in business life⁷⁸. Among other topics, he emphasized that tax amnesty would put the treasury in trouble⁷⁹, the restoration of the General Directorate of Post and Telegraph to the status of a ministry would increase the power of the Ottoman posts vis-à-vis European posts, and that the institution needed for medical staff⁸⁰.

Mahmud Bedri Bey offered his opinion on issues such as the Muhajirs coming to Anatolia from the Caucasus, Crimea, and Bulgaria⁸¹; the salaries of civil servants; the organization of the Ministry of Finance; and the administration of the estates. Regarding the last issue, he suggested to the government that the practices of the Private Treasury of the Sultan (*Hazine-i Hassa*) regarding the creation of villages should be followed⁸². Mahmud Bedri Bey expressed his gratitude on behalf of the Albanians for Sultan Mehmed Reşad's Rumelia trip in June 1911⁸³, and he did not take any active action since then. After this no detailed information about Mahmud Bedri Bey appears from public records. On November 11, 1911, Ahmet Müfit Bey stated that Mahmud Bedri Bey had asked for 20 days leave from parliamentary sessions to repair his house in Aksaray, which had burned down⁸⁴. Mahmud Bedri Bey did not participate in the parliamentary works in early November and his participation in the following sessions was very limited.

The name of Mahmud Bedri Bey is found for the last time in the Parliamentary Minutes on January 13, 1912, among those who voted against the draft law on the amendment of Article 35 of the Code of Laws concerning the dissolution of parliament⁸⁵. After the 1912 by-

⁷⁸ Mmzc, R.15.01.1327 (M. March 28, 1911), 67/2, pp. 410-411.

⁷⁹ Mmzc, R.22.01.1327 (M. April 4, 1911), 72/1, p. 12, 27.

⁸⁰ Mmzc, R.02.02.1327 (M. April 15, 1911), 80/2, pp. 325-328, 341-342.

⁸¹ Mmzc, R.04.03.1327 (M. May 17, 1911), 100/6, pp. 610-611.

⁸² Mmzc, R.11.03.1327 (M. May 24, 1911), 106/2, pp. 149-167.

⁸³ K. Kuzucu, *Balkanlar'da Son Osmanlı Padişahı: Sultan V. Mehmed Reşad'ın 1911 Yılındaki Rumeli Seyahati*, «Uluslararası Türk Kültür Coğrafyasında Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi», 2, 2 (2017), p. 17.

⁸⁴ Mmzc, R.29.08.1327 (M. November 11, 1911), 14/1, pp. 362-363.

⁸⁵ Mmzc, R.31.10.1327 (M. January 13, 1912), 37/2, p. 510.

elections, he is no longer listed among the members of parliament⁸⁶. His constituency, Peja, was no longer an Ottoman territory, and it was decided that it would remain within the borders of Montenegro, not within the borders of Albania, which gained autonomous status in December 1912 and was recognized as independence in 1913⁸⁷.

10. Conclusion

The Balkans is a region which includes peoples of different beliefs, ethnicities, and cultures, and in the last period of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan Peninsula became a field of pro- and anti-Ottoman struggle. In the course of these struggles, Albania was the last region that separated from the Ottoman Empire, while among Ottoman state officials, there were those who supported and those who opposed these separation processes. Mahmud Bedri Bey was a supporter of Ottoman unity and political continuity.

Mahmud Bedri Bey lived in the period when the Ottoman state and society were affected by nationalist movements. Between 1862 and 1895, he worked at different levels of the Ministry of Post and Telegraph from civil servant to director, inspector to chief director, across a wide geography of the Ottoman state, from Niš to Aleppo. Although he faced investigations regarding his role in the institution's financial affairs, no permanent negative decisions were made against him. On the contrary, he progressed in his profession with promotions and medals. His career in the state bureaucracy is, in fact, an example of the reflections of the political, economic, and social tremors of the Ottoman Empire on its bureaucratic functioning.

Mahmud Bedri Bey became a member of parliament for Peja at a time when nationalist movements began to gain political power among Ottoman Albanians. It was commented about Mahmud Bedri Bey that «it was accepted by the entire province that he was an experienced, compassionate and patriotic person»⁸⁸. The fact that he was promoted in 1895 in order to benefit from his presence in the capital while there was an ongoing investigation against him can be understood as a testament to the value placed on his working life. Being asked to take a senior position in Peja while he was working in İstanbul is further

⁸⁶ F. Ahmad, AR. Dankwart, *İkinci Meşrutiyet Döneminde Meclisler: 1908-1918* cit., p. 265.

⁸⁷ M. Aydın, *Arnavutluk'un Osmanlı Devleti'nden Kopuşu Sorunu (1912-1913)* cit., p. 1121.

⁸⁸ M. Yavaş, *İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi'nde İttihâd-i Osmânî Arnavud Maârif Mahfilinin Kuruluş ve Faaliyetleri* cit., p. 633.

proof of this. As an Ottoman bureaucrat who was aware of his Albanian origin he also wanted to support Albanian culture in the Oşışe district of Peja with the construction of a school and mosque.

When his proposals and comments in the parliamentary sessions are examined, he can be evaluated as an Ottoman bureaucrat who took into account the conditions of the country in different fields such as economy, politics, security, foreign relations, independence, culture, education, transportation, and health, and strived to improve them. It is clear that he acted with the awareness of the integrity and continuity of state affairs. It could be argued that the problems he experienced in his working life were due to the country's conditions; however, personal conflicts also played a role in his troubles.

Mahmud Bedri Bey's ideas on the written language of Ottoman Albanians at different times seem to contradict one other. During the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, he approved of those who preferred Latin letters to preserve the Albanian national identity and culture against the anti-Ottoman nationalist movements in the Balkans. During the Second Constitutional Monarchy, he saw Arabic letters as a solution for the continuity of Albanian identity and culture, this time in accordance with the understanding of Ottoman unity.

Mahmud Bedri Bey's date of birth is known and detailed information about his working life is available, but no information about his date of death can be found in the archives or other sources; after 1912, information about him ends. There is, however, ample evidence both of Mahmud Bedri Bey's consciousness of being Ottoman and of his desire to protect his Albanian cultural identity at a time when the Ottoman Empire was busy with nationalist movements. In the age of nationalism, Mahmud Bedri Bey displayed characteristics that can be evaluated as a kind of in-betweenness. Known by everyone but embraced by no one, Mahmud Bedri Bey has not been sufficiently appreciated in either Albanian or Ottoman history. He was in favor of the independence of the Ottoman Empire, which he saw as a guarantee for Albanian identity. This was not accepted by the Albanian nationalists and could not be evaluated sufficiently by the Ottomans due to the conflicts between the old and the new regime in the Ottoman Empire.

Mahmud Bedri Bey started his working life in the Balkans and continued for 33 years in different parts of the Ottoman lands, serving 13 years in İstanbul and after 1908, for four years as a member of parliament. He deserves to be remembered as an Ottoman civil servant who was well aware of his Albanian origin and who acted in favor of Ottoman unity in the half-century-long service he provided to the state.