

The Ottoman Isolationism and Non-Interventionism in the Mid-18th Century: A Research About the Political-Intellectual Change in the Later Early Modern Age

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The quarter century after 1739 has become a scene of unceasing and ruthless wars among the leading European powers unseen since the Treaty of Utrecht, in 1713. As these struggles went on, the Ottoman statesmen chose to be isolationist and they were non-interventionist in the European conflicts. This stance showed itself first in the Polish War of Succession in 1733. The Ottoman isolationism was reluctantly interrupted in the mid-1730s, however later as the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48) ceased the Habsburg dominance in Central Europe; as the Seven Years War (1756-63) made the Russian Tsardom and Prussian Kingdom the great “eastern” powers, the Ottomans did not accept France’s pressing proposals to intervene the changing balances in Europe. This article names the period from 1739 to 1768 as the “isolation of the Ottoman Empire from the European balance of power” and attempts to explain why the Ottoman policymakers closed themselves towards European struggles, even if there were many expedient occasions to intervene. It will be argued that the Ottoman foreign policy in these 29 years was conducting an intentional strategy to secure the favorable status quo in the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739. The alleged problems in the army were partly a kind of political rhetoric to keep the Empire from any struggle in Europe. The early modern Ottoman proactive policies in Polish matters, the attempts to conquer the Habsburg capital, and the efforts to secure the Hungarian territories were now deserted strategies. Were all Ottoman statesmen unanimously agreeing upon this isolationist policy? What was the political, military, and intellectual background of this attitude? These questions will be researched in this paper, through official reports about European affairs arriving in Istanbul from various channels and the comments and remarks of Ottoman statesmen for these reports.