

# Treaty of Karlowitz: (Un)Successful Ottoman Diplomacy and Its Impact on Serbia

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the main subjects of Ottoman diplomacy during the negotiation and signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. Two major figures were the Ottoman reis-ul-kuttab Rami Mehmed Pasha and the famous *dragoman* (interpreter) of Greek origin Alexandros Mavrokordatos. It was the first treaty under which terms the Ottoman Empire had lost its territories, but it could also be considered a certain diplomatic success since the border lines were drawn according to the *uti possidetis* principle, which reflected the status quo as it was on the battlefield. Since the Ottomans were defeated in this war, the loss of territories could have been even bigger.

Not only that the Treaty had been signed on the territory of the Republic of Serbia of today (Sremski Karlovci, nearby Novi Sad), but also the major war operations took place on the Serbian territory. First the victories of Austrian forces, and then their retreat and success of the Ottoman army in the seizure and reconquest of Belgrade and Niš, as well as the well-known Big Migration of Serbs in 1690, had their consequences not only on the history of Serbia and the Serbian people in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but also on the course of events that led to the First Serbian Uprising.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Diplomacy, Reis-ul-Kuttab, Dragoman, Treaty of Karlowitz, The Great Vienna War

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The Ottoman Empire's diplomatic structure was unconventional and differed in many ways from its European counterparts. Traditionally, foreign affairs were conducted by the *reis-ul-kuttab* (chief clerk or secretary of state) who was also responsible for other duties.<sup>1</sup> In 1836, a Foreign Ministry was created. In negotiating the Peace Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), the first peace treaty where the Ottomans took part in negotiations as the defeated side, the most important figures from the Ottoman *diplomatic team* were reis-ul-kuttab Rami Mehmed Efendi and the interpreter (dragoman, tercüman) Alexandros Mavrokordatos, from the prominent Greek Phanariote Family.

The Treaty of Karlowitz as the culmination of the events that took place during the Great Turkish War, in other historiographies also known as The Great Viennese War or in Serbian as Велики бечки рат (Veliki Bečki Rat), introduces us to two crucial figures for the future of the Ottoman Empire in the likes of Rami Mehmed Pasha (1645–1706) and Alexandros Mavrokordatos (1641–1709). These two extraordinary men were tasked with representing the interests of the Ottoman sultan during the peace talks following the ceasefire. However, this quickly proved to be a tremendous diplomatic challenge and no easy feat as the Ottoman Empire faced an unprecedented situation.

The Great Turkish War, which encompasses a number of conflicts between the Holy League of 1684 and the Ottoman Empire that took place over the span of 15 years, is also referred to as *the 14th crusade* since the forces of Christian Europe waged war on the Ottoman Empire in hopes of recovering numerous strategically important territories.<sup>2</sup> The Ottoman forces were evidently defeated and agreed to enter negotiations that had the potential to officially declare that it had lost territories. The Ottoman delegation that was sent to the town of Sremski Karlovci (Karlowitz) in present-day Serbia consisted of Rami Mehmed Pasha, as the representative of the grand vizier Amcazade Huseyin Pasha, and Alexandros Mavrakordatos as the official translator (dragoman).<sup>3</sup>

1 See also Carter Findley, "The Legacy of Tradition to Reform: Origins of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 1/No. 4, October 1970, pp. 334–357.

2 Selcuk Aksin Somel, *The A to Z of the Ottoman Empire*, Vol. 152. The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Lanham/Maryland 2010.

3 Uğur Kurtaran, "Karlofça Antlaşması'nda Venedik, Lehistan ve Rusya'ya Verilen Ahidnamelerin Genel Özellikleri ve Diplomatik Açından Değerlendirilmesi", *TAD*, Vol. 35/No. 60, 2016, pp. 97–139.

On the Turkish side, the most important negotiator of the Treaty was Rami Mehmed Pasha, a remarkable statesman who held numerous state positions throughout his life. In 1696 he became the reis-ul-kuttab of the Ottoman court which made it possible for him to duly represent the grand vizier at the time. This office of the reis-ul-kuttab, a senior position in the Ottoman bureaucracy, will over time evolve into the position of the minister of foreign affairs. As a bureaucrat of such ranking and calibre, he was given the extremely difficult task of leading the negotiations in Sremski Karlovci. Since the states within the Holy League approached the peace treaty with the *uti possidetis* principle, the Ottoman Empire attempted to give an answer in the form of the *ala halihi* principle.<sup>4</sup>

Rami Mehmed Pasha is praised for his diplomatic skills despite the fact the Ottoman Empire could not evade losing its territories. He is regarded as a man of many *firsts* as he could be considered as the first Ottoman Turkish diplomat who sat down to negotiate terms with negative impact on the expansionist ambitions of the Empire. Rami Mehmed Pasha is also the first grand vizier that was appointed from the *kalemiyye* (clerk) class, unlike his predecessors who had a *seyfiyye* (military) background. This crucial promotion to the post of the grand vizier came merely four years after the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz and it seems as though it set the trend of diplomacy-savvy bureaucrats entering into the highest ranks in the Ottoman state. However, Rami Mehmed Pasha soon understood that he would have to work closely with the Sheikh-ul-Islam (Şeyhülislâm) Feyzullah Efendi, under whose influence Mustafa II remained.<sup>5</sup> Despite this, Rami Pasha was determined to carry out important reforms in the post-war period. Unfortunately, his reign as the grand vizier was cut short due to the so-called Edirne incident (*Edirne Vakası*) of 1703.<sup>6</sup> This incident was in reality a big rebellion of the janissaries, who capitalised on the fact the sultan was not residing in Istanbul, but rather in Edirne, the old capital. Their revolt targeted the Sheikh-ul-Islam Feyzullah Efendi and the sultan himself and came as a direct consequence of the unfavourable terms of the Treaty of Karlowitz. As a result, Sheikh-ul-Islam was killed and sultan Mustafa II was forced to step down together with Rami Mehmed Pasha as his grand

4 Kurtaran, *ibid.* pp. 97-139.

5 Yaşar Yücel-Ali Sevim, *Türkiye Tarihi, Vol. III*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, İstanbul 1991, pp. 247-250.

6 Somel, *ibid.* p. 238

vizier. The pure dissatisfaction of the janissaries with the economic situation in the country resulted in Rami Mehmed Pasha being sent to posts in Egypt, Cyprus, and ultimately Rhodos, where he died in prison.

Most recently, the piece of land he was gifted from Mustafa II was turned into a modern library with a rich catalogue of books. The same area was used for multiple purposes including a military base since the times of Rami Mehmed Pasha, but the brand-new library still carries his name. To the lovers of Turkish divan poetry, this fact should come as a meaningful fulfilment as Mehmed Pasha had an affinity towards the art of poetry. In divan poetry, poets used pseudonyms known as *mahlas*. These pseudonyms were often epithets that would describe one prominent characteristic of its holder. The mahlas Mehmed Pasha used for himself was *Rami* meaning obedient (*itaatkâr*) referring to his unwavering loyalty to the Empire. He is also known to have been a close friend of the brilliant poet Nabi, with whom he went on a hajj to Mecca and Medina. All of Rami Mehmed Pasha's poems are collected in one Divân and his letters are saved in a collection (*Münşeât*). He also wrote about his observations of the peace negotiations during the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz in a script called *Vakay-i Mûsâlaha* (Events of the Peace Making).

The events of the said peacemaking were made possible thanks to the work of Alexandros Mavrakordatos who was introduced into the Ottoman delegation as the official translator (dragoman). Due to his Greek origin, his name can be seen in different sources as either Aleksandır Mavrakordat, Alexandros Mavrakordatos or İskerletzâde Aleksandre (İskender) Mavrakordato as he was known on the Ottoman court. However, his work did not involve only enabling communication between the Ottoman delegation and the representatives of the Holy League, he is also said to have been actively fighting for Ottoman interests. Alexandros was a well-educated man who held degrees in medicine from the famous universities of Padua and Bologna in Italy. The fact that he had acquired degrees at European universities could potentially be attributed to his Phanariot Greek origin.

It was precisely the Treaty of Karlowitz that opened a door of possibilities for Ottoman Greeks to enter the top of Ottoman bureaucracy. Phanariot Greeks represent a group of the 11 most influential families which resided in the Phanar (Fener) neighbourhood of Istanbul. It is exactly in this neighbourhood that the Patriarchal Cathedral Church of St. George, which is located as the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (*Rum*

*Patrikanesi*). Therefore, Phanariot Greeks kept a close relationship with the Church. However, contrary to what would be the immediate response to this fact, Phanariots remain loyal to the Ottoman Empire which made it possible for them to reach numerous prestigious government positions. They were said to have been fighting for Ottoman interests, which naturally puts them in conflict with the rest of the Greek population and their ambitions for a national state as they were not fond of the idea of Greek independence. Stojan Novaković (1842 - 1915), one of the most prominent and renowned Serbian historians and diplomats described Phanariots as very gentle people and as alienated aristocrats.<sup>7</sup>

The Great Turkish War (1683-1699) had great consequences not only for the history of the Ottoman Empire but for the history of the whole Europe and Serbia<sup>8</sup> in particular. The war was provoked by the unsuccessful second Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683, which led, as mentioned, to the formation of the Holy League in 1684 (which included the Habsburg Empire, Poland, and Venetia and two years later the Holy League was joined by Russia), whose armed forces attacked Ottomans on the four different war fronts.<sup>9</sup>

Not only did massive war operations take place in territories inhabited by the Serbian population, but also gave great hope to the Serbs that they could establish, if not a fully independent state, at least a vassal state under Christian Austria. That was the reason why many Serbs who had lived within the waste frontiers of the Ottoman Empire took part in the Austrian troops, along with the Serbs who had already migrated to the Habsburg Empire.<sup>10</sup>

However, short periods of Austrian domination in Serbia (Belgrade was conquered in 1688, and during the next year Niš had fallen into Austrian

7 Dušan Spasojević, *Grčka – Rat Za Nezavisnost, Stvaranje Države i Preporod Nacije*, (Greece – The War for Independence, the Creation of the State and the Revival of the Nation) Čigoja štampa, Belgrade 2021, p. 99.

8 The term Serbia in this paper has been used to annotate the territory of the Republic of Serbia of today. There was no Ottoman Administrative Unit under this name, but the territory of the former Despotate of Serbia (fall under Ottoman domination with the surrender of the capital of Smederevo in 1459) had been divided into several Ottoman administrative units – *sanjaks*.

9 Encyclopedia%20of%20Ottoman%20Empire%20by%20G.%20Agoston%20and%20B.%20Masters.pdf

10 More on Serbia in the eve of the Great Vienna War, see Rajko Veselinović, “Narodnocrkvena i privilegijska pitanja Srba u Habsburškoj Monarhiji 1699-1716” (“National Church and Privilege Issues of Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy 1699-1716”). *Istorija Srpskog Naroda*, Vol. IV./No.1, Srpska Knjijevna Zadruga, Belgrade 1986, pp. 39-54.

hands as well) showed that Habsburg Empire did not have the intention to let the Serbs establish their independent state (not even the vassal one); they just wanted it to go under the Habsburg domination instead of the domination of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>11</sup>

The intentions of Austria were clearly shown in their attitude toward an extremely disputable but important figure, *count* Branković, who can be regarded as the first Serbian diplomat after the fall of the Medieval Serbian State.<sup>12</sup> Djordje Branković was born in a prominent Serbian family in Transilvania. He was born in the town of Ineu, Romania of today, near Arad, on the frontier of Transilvania which was a vassal state to the Ottomans and the region of Banat, which was under full Ottoman domination. He was brought up by his elder brother Simeon, who became the Orthodox Archbishop, thus two of them move to Gyula (Hungary of today), which was at the time administrative, but also the confessional centre of Transilvania (Erdelj). There lived together Hungarians, Germans, Romanians, as well as a small number of Serbs. Regarding their religion, the majority were Protestants (Calvinists), but there were also Catholics and Orthodox Christians. There, he got a good education, since he needed to be prepared for the diplomatic service. He learned foreign languages: Latin, Hungarian, Romanian, Ottoman Turkish and German.<sup>13</sup>

His first diplomatic mission was in 1663 when the Ottomans started their second campaign toward Vienna. He was assigned as an interpreter to the

11 Tatjana Katić, *Osmanskog osvajanje Srbije 1690 Godine. (Ottoman conquest of Serbia in 1690)*. Serbian Genealogical Center/ Center for Ottoman Studies, Belgrade 2012; Stanovjević, 1974.

12 The historical science has not yet certain about all details regarding Djordje Branković. He claimed to be descendant of the Serbian medieval Branković dynasty, which has never been proved and attempted to organize "free Serbian territory" on the newly conquered Austrian territories in Hungary. However, the Habsburgs were not inclined to his ideas, and first arrested him and later even ended his life. For more details, see: Jovan Radonjić, *Grof Đorđe Branković i njegovo vreme (count Đorđe Branković and his time)*, Kinq Academy of Sciences, Belgrade 1911; Jelka Redep, *Grof Đorđe Branković i usmena tradicija. Geneza Hronika grofa Đorđa Brankovića (Count Đorđe Branković and orgal tradition. Origin of the Chronicles of Đorđe Branković)*, Novi Sad 1936. The newest study on this topic is the article by Siniša Đuričić, "Grof Đodrđe Branković između istoriografije i političkog oportunizma" (*Count Đorđe Branković Between Historiography and Political Opportunism*), *Istorija i Interpretacija. Tumači i Tumačenja Vojvođanske Prošlosti*, ed. Miomir Samardžić, Filozofski Fakultet, Novi Sad 2020, pp. 9-26.

13 Branko Bešlin, *Evgenije Savojski i Njegovo Doa (Eugene of Savoy and His Era)*. Matica Srpska, Novi Sad 2014, pp. 186-192.

Transilvanian deputy sent to the Sublime Porte. However, the elected deputy died while on the road and Branković although only 18 years old, took his place. He stayed in the Ottoman Empire for a year, and after that had two more missions to Constantinople.<sup>14</sup>

The milestone in his activities presented his journey to Moscow, where with his brother Archbishop Sava was engaged in dialogue with the representatives of Russia. The aim of Russia at the time was to become the protector of the Orthodox population both in the Habsburg and Ottoman Empire and with their help to open to itself the road toward the Black Sea, to the Balkans and Constantinople.<sup>15</sup> After returning from Russia, Đorđe Branković performed diplomatic tasks at the Porte for eight years with shorter interruptions (1699-1677).<sup>16</sup> He became involved in the intelligence network as a double agent; on the one hand, he informed the Porte about the conditions prevailing among the Hungarian emigrants in Transilvania (Erdel), who were opponents of the Habsburgs and Emperor Leopold I. On the other hand, he got in touch with the Austrian envoy and informed him about the plans of the Hungarians and Turks.<sup>17</sup>

In writing, he presented to the Austrian emperor the idea of creating a special territory in the south of Hungary, which would have a similar status to the Military Border in Croatia and which would represent protection against the Ottomans for the Habsburgs, but due to circumstances, that memorandum was sent to Emperor Leopold only in 1683, when Kara Mustafa Pasha had already advanced towards Vienna. In the years that followed, Đorđe Branković had neither the strength nor the power to raise the Serbs in the Banat to revolt, even when the Austrian troops penetrated the region. In 1688, he changed his political course again and decided to turn to Russia for help, although he did not stop negotiations with Leopold.<sup>18</sup>

Where the Austrians were increasingly achieving military successes and approaching Belgrade, Branković tried in every way to organize the Serbs to an uprising. However, at the same time, the mistrust of the Austrian court towards him started to grow. The epilogue is well known. Patriarch Arsenije

14 Bešlin, *ibid.* p. 192.

15 Bešlin, *ibid.* p. 193.

16 For more details, see: Radonjić: 1911; Đuričić, *ibid.*

17 For more details, see: Radonjić: 1911; Đuričić, *ibid.*

18 Bešlin, *ibid.* pp. 194-195.



III transferred a certain number (the exact number has not been established in historical science, but the most accurate estimate is that around 80,000 people emigrated) of Serbs, who settled on Austrian territory, without receiving an autonomous region, and Đorđe Branković was arrested. Thus ended the dream of an uprising and a state, a dream that will begin to come true more than a century later, with many struggles, ups and downs, successes, and failures, struggles and negotiations.<sup>19</sup>

After the arrest of Đorđe Branković, the Serbs had not been left with many choices. After the Austrian troops took Belgrade and Niš from the Ottomans, the Ottoman offensive had begun with its full force. They recaptured Niš and then Belgrade, which caused immense fear within the Serbian population since they were immensely supporting Habsburg Empire and even took part in the Austrian military formations. Therefore, the Patriarch of the Peć Patriarchate Arsenije III Crnojević led the Great Migrations of the Serbs in 1690. From Peć through Novi Pazar, the Serbs from the southern parts led by their spiritual leader, came first to Belgrade, where they waited for permission from the Habsburg authorities to cross to their side. They were hoping to be given land to cultivate and live on in exchange for their military services to the Habsburg Empire.

Even that permission had not been given immediately or without hesitation. But Serbs still believed that they would have better living conditions in the Christian Habsburg Empire than in Islamic Ottoman Empire.<sup>20</sup>

According to Gligor Stanojević, no previous Ottoman-Habsburg war had as much importance for the history of the Serbian people, as well as for the two warring parties, as the Great Vienna War. After almost 150 years, Serbia again had become a battlefield and from an internal province of the Empire, it became a border area. Major political changes in Europe also had

19 For more details about the Great Migration see Veselinović, *ibid.* pp. 39-54.

20 The sequence of events that would follow after the Treaty of Passarowitz when Habsburg Empire had occupied northern Serbia, showed that this was not accurate way of thinking. The Austrian rule in Serbia at the time lasted only twenty years until the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739, when Ottoman Empire had retaken that territory. Two years before the Treaty of Belgrade was signed a delegation of Serbs led by a certain *knez* Petar from Jagodina went to Constantinople to ask from Mahmud I to accept the Serbs as Ottoman subjects again. According to the document kept in the Başbakanlık Archive in Istanbul, the Austrians had been more severe in the confessional policy than the Ottomans. For more details see: Peace of Passarowitz, 1718, ed. C. Ingrao, N. Samardžić and J. Pešelj, Purdue University Press: 2011.



consequences for the further historical development of the Serbian people.<sup>21</sup>

The first peace initiative came as early as 1689 by England and Holland, but then it was abruptly because of the Ottoman offensive and the recapture of Belgrade in 1690. However, the Ottoman defeat at the battle of Senta in 1697 showed the weakness of the Ottoman army and the urgent need to terminate the war.<sup>22</sup>

With the Peace of Karlowitz, the Ottoman Empire experienced the greatest territorial losses in its history: Austria conquered all of Hungary, without the Banat region, then Slavonia, Srem up to the line Mitrovica - Slankamen, and all of Lika. A large part of the Serbs came under Austrian rule.<sup>23</sup>

In that war, Austria asserted itself as the leading European power in solving the Eastern Question. With the Peace of Karlowitz, the Ottoman withdrawal from Central Europe begins, and its dominance in the Balkans also becomes questionable.<sup>24</sup> However, as stated by Gabriel Agoston: "Despite Istanbul's apparent military weakness and unfavourable diplomatic situation, the Ottoman peace delegation managed to conclude a treaty without further territorial sacrifice, reflecting simply the status quo."<sup>25</sup>

With the first conquests in Serbia, states Gligor Stanojević, Austria showed the true face of the conquerors. Although they were welcomed with joy as a Christian power, as well as because of the large number of prominent Serbs at the Viennese court, the Serbs quickly saw the true face of the new rulers. The aggressive attitude of the Austrians and the absolute rejection of any Serbian autonomous territory even within the Eighth Empire, showed the only Austrian goal: the incorporation of the Serbian territories into their Empire, which they claimed based on the previous possession of the Hungarian crown.<sup>26</sup>

21 Gligor Stanojević, *Srbija u Vreme Bečkog Rata (Serbia During the Vienna War)*, Nolit, Belgrade 1976, p. 230.

22 Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire by G. Agoston and B. Masters.pdf

23 Stanojević, *ibid.*, p. 230.

24 Stanojević, *ibid.*, p. 231.

25 Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire by G. Agoston and B. Masters.pdf

26 Stanojević, *ibid.* 232.

According to many historians, the Ottoman Empire was already on its way down after the death of Suleiman. After the Peace of Karlovac, difficult days will come for the Ottomans, characterized by internal unrest, changes in the throne, as well as frequent changes of grand viziers.

Since that moment, the perceptions regarding the division of the Ottoman Empire had begun to emerge among the major European powers. This treaty was the beginning of the end of Ottoman rule in Europe, Asia and Africa. However, the Treaty of Karlovci had been just the beginning of the serious deterioration of the “*II Man of the Bosphorus*” as the Ottoman Empire had been called by it Western contemporaries.<sup>27</sup>

The treaty of Karlovci had been only an introduction to the period called *Wars for Serbia*, led between the Ottoman Empire and Hapsburg Monarchy in the 18th century.<sup>28</sup> The period of Austrian rule in Serbia (1718-1739) had presented the disconnection in the almost three centuries-long Ottoman rule in this region. The Serbs had greeted the Austrians enthusiastically, convinced that it would have brought many positive changes and contributed to the renewal of the Serbian State. However, the chain of events had shown that the Serbian optimism had not been built on the right premises.

The treaty of Karlowatz was the obvious beginning of the decline of the mighty Ottoman Empire. The Habsburg Monarchy, and even Russia, took over the lead in dealing with issues in South-Eastern Europe.

27 *Istorija Osmanskog Carstva (History of the Ottoman Empire)*, ed. Robert. Mantran, CLIO, Belgrade 2002; *Istorija Srpskog Naroda, Vol. IV/1*.

28 For more details, see: Ema Miljković, “The Habsburg–Ottoman “Wars for Serbia in the 18th Century: Political Gains and Demographic Consequences”, *XI. Balkan Tarihi Kongresi, Balkanlar: Savaş ve Barış I*, ed. Mehmet Yavuz Erler, Samsun Mübadele ve Balkan Türk Kültürü Araştırmaları Derneği, Samsun 2018, pp. 87-95.

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