

Marmara Denizi'nde Silah Kaçaklığı Merkezi Olarak Güney Marmara Adaları (1890-1914)

South Marmara Islands as the Center of Arms Trafficking in the Marmara Sea (1890-1914)*

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Abstract

The most important of the South Marmara Islands, namely the Paşalimanı, Avşa and Ekinlik islands are in an extremely strategic point geographically because they are close to the Kapıdağ peninsula and located at the mouth of the Dardanelles. A majority of the population of the islands being non-Muslim and Greek -particularly after Greece broke away from the Ottoman state in 1829- increased the strategic importance of the region even further. In addition to grape and distillery produce, shipping to distant ports and in particular the Greek ports constituted a significant source of the island's income.

The developments that occurred in the Balkans and lack of power since the end of the 19th century in conjunction with the Greek and Armenian movements within the Ottoman Empire gave birth to a new form of illegal economy-arms trafficking-on the Marmara Islands. We see that this illegal activity intensified significantly after the Russo-Turkish War during the reign of Abdulhamid II and the Second Constitutional era. This study will be focusing on the periods of Abdulhamid II and the Second Constitution, examining the illegal arms trade, the reasons for the Marmara Islands being the center of this illegal trade, and the political and administrative initiatives of the Ottoman State to prevent this trade.

Key Words: South Marmara Islands, the Ottoman Empire, arms trafficking, Greece, Balkans

Öz

En önemlileri Paşalimanı, Marmara, Avşa ve Ekinlik adaları olan Güney Marmara adaları Kapıdağ yarımadasına son derece yakın bulunmaları ve Çanakkale boğazının ağzında yer almaları açısından coğrafi olarak son derece stratejik bir noktada bulunmaktaydı. Adalar halkının büyük bir kısmının gayri Müslim ve Rum kökenli olması da -özellikle 1829'da Yunanistan'ın Osmanlı'dan ayrılması akabinde- bölgenin stratejik önemini bir kat daha arttırmıştı. Stratejik açıdan bu denli önemli olan güney Marmara adalarının en önemli geçim kaynağını üzüm ve mükirat üretiminin yanı sıra uzak limanlar ve özellikle Yunanistan iskeleleri ile yapılan nakliyat oluşturmaktaydı.

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19. yüzyılın sonlarından itibaren Balkanlarda yaşanan gelişmeler ve güç boşluğu bölgedeki Rum ve Ermeni milliyetçi hareketleriyle de bağlantılı olarak Güney Marmara adalarında yeni bir illegal ekonominin –silah kaçakçılığının- doğmasına neden olmuştu. Bu illegal faaliyetin 93 Harbi sonrasında II. Abdülhamid ve II. Meşrutiyet dönemlerinde bölgede yoğunlaştığı görülmektedir. Bu çalışma, II. Abdülhamid ve II. Meşrutiyet dönemlerine yoğunlaşarak Güney Marmara Adaları merkezli olarak yapılan kaçak silah ticaretini, nedenlerini ve bu ticareti önlemek için Osmanlı siyasi ve idari mercilerinin girişimlerini mercek altına alacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güney Marmara Adaları, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, silah ticareti, Yunanistan, Balkanlar

Introduction

Throughout the 19th century, the South Marmara Islands consisting of fourteen islands, four of which are inhabited in the northwest of the Kapıdağ Peninsula were sometimes governed as an independent township and sometimes as a subdivision under the administration of Erdek¹. (Ozil 2013:45) Almost all the population of the township of Erdek that forms the southern coasts of the Marmara Sea and is a sub-district of the Sanjak of Karesi in the Hüdavendigâr Province (80% Erdek, 97% Kapıdağ peninsula) and the Marmara Islands, namely the Paşalimanı, Ekinlik, Arablar (Avşa) islands, were Greek.² Proconnessus, that is, the Marmara Island is the largest of these islands. At the beginning of the 20th century, more than 9.000 of the total population of almost 10.000 were Greek. Similarly, the entire 5.000 population of the Paşalimanı (Aloni) Island-apart from 70 Muslims- were Greek. There were 700 Muslims on the Avşa Island that had the largest population of Muslims, compared with the Greek population of 1.300. The Ekinlik Island that had the lowest number of inhabitants of the four islands and which consisted mainly of Greeks, gained recognition for its shipping activities to distant European ports³.

Kapıdağ Peninsula and the Erdek port served as a common junction for the Marmara Islands. The people of the Kapıdağ peninsular consisting

- 1 Ayşe Ozil, *Orthodox Christians in the Late Ottoman Empire: A Study of Communal Relations in Anatolia*, London: Routledge, 2013, p.45.
- 2 Ozil, ibid, p.45. Since the 19th century, the coastal areas and surroundings were inhabited by Anatolian Greeks. One of the main reasons for this was the economic opportunities with the increase of industrialization and urbanization, particularly in larger centers along the coast or close to the coastal areas. Gerasimos Augustinos *Küçük Asya Rumları: Ondokuzuncu Yüzyılda İnanç, Cemaat ve Etnisite*, Ankara: Ayraç Yayınevi, 1997, pp.28-48. In this context, the Greek population that lived along the coastal line that began from the coasts of the Marmara sea and spanned to as far as Antalya constituted a large percentage of the total Greek population. Ahmet Efiloğlu, *Osmanlı Rumları Göç ve Tehcir (1912-1918)*, İstanbul: Bayrak Yayıncılık, 2011, p.22.
- 3 Ari Çokona, *20. Yüzyıl Başlarında Anadolu ve Trakya'daki Rum Yerleşimleri*, İstanbul: Literatür Yayıncılık, 2016, p.150-152.

mainly of Greeks earned a living from olive, wine, silk, fruit production and fishing. In addition to these, shipping was also one of the most important sources of income. The main source of Erdek's livelihood, which like Kapıdağ also had a mainly Greek population, was producing wine, rakı (anise flavored alcoholic drink) and cognac. In this context, the Greeks of Erdek were largely engaged in shipping and fishing⁴.

In a sense, the Eastern Marmara coasts were virtually an extension/suburb of the capital Istanbul. In fact, Erdek, the Kapıdağ peninsula and the Marmara Islands were administrative bodies of Galata for a long time and were eventually merged with the Hüdavendigâr province in the 19th century. After this period-because the economy was largely dependent on the capital-these coasts maintained their close connection with Istanbul.⁵ Ottoman documents from the beginning of the 20th century emphasizing that a majority of the local people earned a living from shipping and trade shipping to the coastal regions including the Greek ports and Istanbul indicates the continuation of this process.⁶ However, the Russo-Turkish War was to cause a change in the political and social balance on the south Marmara coasts as it did throughout the entire Ottoman Empire.

The Development and Reasons for Arms Trafficking on the Marmara Islands

Anatolian Greeks began to purchase arms as a result of the Greek nationalism movement and the plan of uniting with Greece that had emerged since the end of the 1800s. ⁷ Arms trafficking reached a climax after the 1890s when

4 Çokona, *ibid*, p.148-149.

5 Ozil, *ibid*, pp.4-5; Şerafeddin Mağmumi, *Bir Osmanlı Doktorunun Anıları*, İstanbul: Büke Yayınları, 2001, p.106. For more detailed information on trade between İstanbul and the south Marmara coasts see. Necmettin Aygün, "19. Yüzyıl Başlarında İstanbul Merkezli Osmanlı Deniz Taşımacılığı", *OTAM*, 23 (2010), pp.68-71.

6 BOA, *DH.İD* 197-8, Lef 4. In fact, in view of the revenue to be secure due to the volume of trade the capital of the Marmara island İstanbul, many parts of the Ottoman Empire ad with foreign countries, the topic of establishing customs facilities in the township of Asmalı was raised in 1905. BOA, *DH.MKT* 965-76.

7 After the Russo-Turkish War, the Greeks that wanted to materialize the Megali Idea, began to seek the opportunity of reversing the boundaries defined with the Treaty of Berlin into their own favor. Although Thessaly was incorporated into their own territories in 1881, the Greek nationalists wanted to annex Epirus, Macedonia and the Crete Island into the Greek lands and carried out activities based around this. Particularly in 1885, Bulgaria's annexation of East Rumeli rekindled the Crete issue and in 1896 conflict between the Muslims-Greeks began and as a result of Greece's stance the Greek war broke out in 1897. Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, V.8, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1988, p.112-125. The process beginning from 1901 until the declaration of the Second Constitution, was a period where not only Bulgarians and Serbs, but also the Greeks resorted to guerrilla activities in an attempt of seizing the Macedonian territories and there was an increase in the Greek resistance movement in the region. Karal, *Ibid*. V. 8 p.146-161; Mehmet Hacısalihoğlu, "Sultan II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Balkan Politikaları", *Sultan II.*

the resistance movements began to group up in the Balkans and resorting to violence became a normal practice⁸. Arms trafficking also appears to have followed a parallel pattern on the Marmara coasts. Indeed, the time when illegal arms sales was most apparent in the region was the period between 1887-1897 after the Russo-Turkish War when there were attempts to materialize the plans of expanding Greece, uprisings began to surface in Crete and Eastern Rumelia was going through a depression.

In this period, these islands that appear as a continuation of the Bandırma-Erdek region emerged as a stopover on the arms trafficking shipping route. As a large part of the coastal area between the Izmit Gulf and Bandırma was uninhabited, and due to the rocky structure of the region and inadequate security forces to provide sufficient public order on land and sea, illegal trafficking was most common in this part of the Marmara Sea⁹. The purpose of this illegal arms trade where the Southern Marmara Islands emerged as a base was to provide arms to the non-Muslims along the coasts of the Marmara Sea in the period where Greek nationalism reached a peak. Indeed, the increase in arms trade is in parallel with the insufficiency of law and order on the Marmara coasts where there was a concentration of non-Muslims, and an increase in activities of the armed guerillas. These illegal arms traded via the islands were sold not only on the southern coasts of Marmara, but also on the northern coasts, particularly within the borders of the Izmit governorship (mutasarrıflık) for use in guerilla activities¹⁰. A majority of the illegal weapons and ammunition in question were shipped from Europe by foreign ships or from Cunda and Greek islands which were virtually like a “store of hazardous freight”¹¹, then brought ashore by kayaks used for trafficking or by Greek flagged ships that traded in the Black Sea, Marmara, Aegean and Mediterranean Seas and later distributed to the

- Abdülhamid Han ve Dönemi*, İstanbul: TBMM Milli Saraylar, 2017, p.118-120.
- 8 Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, “Tools of Revolution: Global Military Surplus, Arms Dealers and Smugglers in the Late Ottoman Balkans, 1878-1908”, *Past and Present*, 237 (2017), p.167.
- 9 Efiloğlu, *ibid*, p.24-26.
- 10 BOA, *BEO* 1797-134730.
- 11 BOA, *DH.TMIK.M* 252-58, p.1. Ayvalık and Cunda Island were also among the regions where the Greeks were engaged in arms smuggling for purposes similar to those in the South Marmara Islands. Weapons smuggling by the Greeks in Ayvalık and especially in Cunda Island followed a very similar process to the Southern Marmara Islands. For detailed information on this, see.Ercimmet Sarıay, “Ayvalık’ta Silah Kaçakçılığı (1890-1912)”, *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 66 (2020), p.250-262; Ercimmet Sarıay, “Osmanlı’da Silah Kaçakçılığı Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme (1908-1910)”, *Sosyal, Beşeri ve İdari Bilimler Alanında Akademik Çalışmalar -II, C.1*, Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı, 2020, p.145-182.

Greek villages in the southern Marmara region¹². These weapons that were trafficked illegally consisted of 'outdated' weapons no longer used by the armies of the Ottoman and Balkan states. The Balkan resistance movements were being supplied with outdated models including Gras (Greek), Henry-Martini (Ottoman, Romanian), Krnka and Berdan (Russian, Bulgarian and Serbian) that were cheap, but effective weapons. The most commonly traded among these weapons were the Gras and Martini rifles together with their ammunition. After the 1900s, the Greek army in particular switching to the new type technology led to an increase of illegal sales of Gras rifles in Ottoman territories¹³.

The activities of ships owned by foreign states- mainly Greek flagged ships- were at the center of arms trafficking carried out along the southern Marmara coasts via the islands since the 1890s until the declaration of the Second Constitution. In fact, this period witnessed extensive arms trafficking activities mainly by Greek flagged ships. In 1891, it was determined that some of the tugboats carrying "harmful freight" sailing between Bandırma and Erdek would stop off at the shores where there were no officials or landing stages-particularly at islands in this region-and unload illegal passengers, merchandise and weapons onto the shore¹⁴. It appears the activities of the ships in question continued, because in 1893 the governor of Karası voiced his unease regarding the same ships that were sailing between the Marmara Island and surrounding areas on a weekly basis stopping off at the deserted places such as Marmara Island's Prastos (Gündoğdu), Paşalimanı Island's Vori (Poyrazlı) ports and the Ekinlik Island where there were no officials, and picking up and unloading goods and passengers at all hours. The governor considered the ships stopping at these points where there were no officials and that had no trade value extremely dangerous. In view of this, he decided to warn the agencies in Istanbul about these activities¹⁵. One of the ships that sailed between Bandırma and Erdek and allegedly stopped off at the "deserted" locations in question called Matilda was a British-flagged vessel, while the others, namely Eleni, Diyofil, Olga, Bosforuz, Poryuz, Malta and Katerina were Greek-flagged ships but the captains of all these ships were Greek citizens¹⁶. Although the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs petitioned both Britain and Greece concerning this matter, these efforts were in vain. The British ambassador responded by saying the Malta ship sailing under the British flag never visited these ports; that they did not even know the port

12 Efiloğlu, *ibid*, p.40-45.

13 Öztan, *ibid*, p.179-181.

14 BOA, *DH.MKT* 1797-127.

15 BOA, *DH.MKT* 199-17, p.2; BOA, *DH.MKT* 258-34.

16 BOA, *DH.MKT* 199-17, p.1.

existed, and the governor of Hüdavendigâr may have been misinformed on the matter¹⁷. Whereas the Greek ambassador said he issued warnings to all the Greek captains concerning this claim¹⁸. When similar complaints continued, the Ottoman state sent an inspector to the region in connection with this issue; in fact, during his investigations in the region he seized illegal weapons and ammunition on three Greek galiot¹⁹. Influenced by these events that occurred since 1891 and on the grounds that the foreign ships were transporting illegal weapons and ammunition, the Ottoman State requested the banning of foreign flagged ships from carrying passengers and commodities in the Marmara Sea, but failed to achieved results from these efforts²⁰.

Activities of the foreign ships were raised again in 1896 when news was received from the boatmen of Tekirdağ that large amounts of gunpowder was found on the Ekinlik island. An official was sent to the island to investigate these claims, but because there was no security official on the island far from the center and when the all the residents “spoke in agreement” because shipping was their only means of earning living, these inquiries were unsuccessful. The governor of the Sanjak of Karesi suspected there was illegal merchandise among the freight on some of the kayaks and ships flying the Ottoman flag that sailed to the Samos Island and along the Greek coasts. In view of this, the governor requested that the ships were search carefully for illegal merchandise such as gunpowder and dynamite when it reached Kale-i Sultaniye (now Çanakkale). Because the Ekinlik Island was situated in a very exquisite area of the Marmara Sea and the residents were constantly in contact with foreign countries via the kayaks that sailed to the island, it was highly possible that they were transporting illegal weapons and ammunition. Moreover foreign flagged ships operating on the Erdek-Istanbul route were stopping “unscheduled (*vakitli vakitsiz*)” at Ekinlik island unloading merchandise and passengers and there was no official to control whether or not these passengers had authorization, there was concern that “suspicious” individuals were entering the Ottoman territories illegally. So the governor of Karesi requested a competent police officer and a force of at least three gendarmerie on the island to prevent the shipping of illegal weapons and ammunition to the Ekinlik Island, search the kayaks and control the travel permits of passengers arriving from the coasts of foreign countries²¹. Although the governor of Biga was written to on several occasions requesting the control of the ships in question, the appointment of police and

17 BOA, *DH.MKT* 199-17, p.6.

18 BOA, *DH.MKT* 199-17, p.11.

19 BOA, *Y.MTV* 64-11.

20 İlhan Ekinci, “Osmanlı Devleti’nde Marmara’da Kabotaj Tartışmaları”, *AKÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 8/1 (2006), p.109.

21 BOA, *DH.TMIK.M* 23-35, p.3.

gendarmerie to the Ekinlik Island was not accepted due to ongoing reforms within the organization, and the governor of Karesi was asked to "handle the situation for now."²².

A few years later in February 1900, it was determined that certain Greek flagged ships including the ship named Eleni that was mentioned earlier were sailing towards the Pire port loaded with weapons, ammunition, gunpowder and dynamite to be sold illegally along the Ottoman coasts, and the Greek government was issued a warning about this²³. In the meantime, the vilayet of Cezayir-i Bahr-i Sefid (Archipelago) warned the Ottoman government that the Greek government was purchasing latest technology weapons, and would therefore attempt to sell the outdated technology Gras rifles illegally along the Ottoman coasts²⁴. In a report written in December 1901 by Halil Pasha, governor of Hüdavengdigar, he stated that the only way to prevent weapon and ammunition trafficking in the province was the allocation of ships to constantly control and observe the extremely vast, isolated coastline. Halil Pasha requested the allocation of a fast ship; the number of police and gendarme to be increased to protect the Marmara coasts from illegal trafficking and basing patrol points at the necessary places for the observations from land continuously²⁵.

It was impossible to prevent illegal trafficking in the Marmara Sea because the demands of local officials were not met due to the lack of funds. Exactly a year after this report-in December 1902-in searches carried out after gunshots were heard from some of the kayaks at Paşalımani, 4 flintlocks, 3 Gras, 1 Karabina, 1 Martini, 4 revolvers and 247 cartridges were seized²⁶. A few years later in May 1905, news that attempts were made to import illegal weapons and ammunition into Ottoman territories by Greek ships, and the request for two patrol ships to be assigned to prevent this illegal trafficking was repeated²⁷. But as in previous cases these ships were never sent. In July of the same year the governor of Tekfurdağı put forth a new proposal to prevent weapon and ammunition trafficking in the Marmara Sea. According to the governor, under no conditions should ships be allowed to sail through the straits and unload merchandise and passengers at the ports or kayaks allowed to dock at landing stages before dawn and after dusk. If these preventions were implemented and the smaller ships were searched carefully then the issue of illegal arms trafficking could be avoided.

22 BOA, *DH.TMIK.M* 23-35, p.5.

23 BOA, *BEO* 1439-107910, p.3.

24 BOA, *İ.HUS* 80-91; BOA, Y.EE.KP 10-994.

25 BOA, *DH.ŞFR* 272-77.

26 BOA, *DH.MKT* 637-15, p.3.

27 BOA, *BEO* 2575-193088.

Irrelevant of whether these were large or small ships, “as long as they were allowed to load and unload merchandise and passengers until late at night” then in all likelihood they would take advantage of the darkness and avoid the inspections of officials²⁸. Therefore, in accordance with the proposal of the governor and approval of the government²⁹, the procedure of refusing to issue pratique³⁰ to ships that were to sail through the Kale-i Sultaniye and Black Sea Straits after sunset was put into force³¹.

Although the application of the new pratique implemented in the Marmara Sea reduced the rate of trafficking to an extent, it failed to solve the issue completely. In May 1907, a ship was seized during an attempt to unload illegal gunpowder in the Prastos (Gündoğdu) village on the Marmara Island. The governor of Tekfurdağı said such incidents could not be prevented because the Marmara coasts were left “unguarded” and emphasized that the patrol ships requested by the governorship of Hüdavendigâr in 1905 should be sent immediately³². Almost a month after this incident, another foreign ship was caught trying to unload illegal goods at the Prastos port. Although the governor of Karesi requested once again that necessary measures were taken to prevent these activities emphasizing these successive incidents³³, these attempts were unsuccessful.

Efforts to Prevent Weapon Trafficking on the South Marmara Islands Before World War I

Illegal trade activities that emerged in the Marmara Sea after the Russo-Turkish War became even more severe and continued throughout the period of uncertainty that surfaced after the declaration of the second constitution. In fact, the gap/confusion in power within the empire that began with the re-declaration of the Constitution on 2 July 1908 until April 1909 when Abdulhamid II was dethroned generated the problem of what should be expected from the constitution and the scene of a lack of public order that resulted from this. This gap in power was also felt on the south Marmara coasts. However, in this period of chaos that continued from the declaration of the second constitution until Abdulhamid II was dethroned, influenced by

28 BOA, *DH.TMIK.M* 252-58, p.3.

29 BOA, *DH.TMIK.M* 252-58, p.1.

30 Pratique was a document issued for the boats to be allowed the leave the port freely. This was a document of clearance issued to vessels that were free of contagious diseases or had completed the term of quarantine and was given a clean bill of health. İsmail Yaşayanlar, “Osmanlı Döneminde Uygulanan Deniz Karantinasına İlişkin Bazı Belgeler”, *Ab-ı Hayat'ı Aramak: Gönül Tekin'e Armağan*, İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, 2018, p.748.

31 BOA, *DH.TMIK.M* 145-45; BOA, *İ.KAN* 3-22; BOA, *YA.HUS* 517-112, p.2.

32 BOA, *DH.MKT* 1051-71, p.4.

33 BOA, *DH.MKT* 1177-63, p.1.

the movements of Greek nationalism a sequence of friction began to surface between both the Greek and Muslim Ottoman citizens and the Ottoman government. Undoubtedly, the fact that non-Muslims were taking up arms since 1890 and were still continuing to take up arms played a major role in this.

Immediately after the declaration of the second constitution-in November 1908-it was reported that some Greeks living in the town of Erdek in the province of Hüdavendigâr were practicing target shooting with Gras and Martini rifles an hour distance away from the center; attempting to buy illegal weapons and ammunition, and were scaring Muslim women in the streets by firing these rifles. As this created mutual hostility between the Muslims and Christians, the governor requested that additional military forces were sent to the region immediately³⁴. In December, the government received similar reports from the Marmara and Paşalimanı Islands. In these reports it was stated that the residents of these islands who were mainly Greek "carried out some activities" against the Muslim people and the government because they "misunderstood the constitution." In view of this, once again the local government requested that public order was enforced on the islands and that a high speed ship was sent to prevent arms trafficking in the region³⁵.

In an attempt of solving the issue of public order on the southern Marmara coasts, the deputy governor of Hüdavendigâr initially sent the Musul torpedo then the Akhisar torpedo boat and the Asar-i Tevfik ironclad ship to the Erdek coast³⁶. Later the Erdek district governor and captain of the Musul torpedo boat Hasan Pasha were sent to the south Marmara Islands to carry out investigations. The residents of the south Marmara islands mentioned reports that after the declaration of the constitution, illegal weapons and ammunition were brought to the islands and a majority of the Greek citizens were buying weapons. According to these reports, a ship called Maryana that flew a British flag but had a Greek crew were bringing weapons and ammunition to the Roda (Narlı) village in the southwest of the Kapıdağ peninsula, the Vori (Poyrazlı) port to the north and Skupya (Balıklı) port in the south of the Paşalimanı island, and also to the Arablar (Avşa) and Kutali (Ekinlik) islands and selling these to the people for a monthly installment of one Mecidiye. In fact, according to a statement by a member of the council of village elders, the first installment of those who were unable to pay was given by the church. Hasan Pasha reported that the issue of illegal trafficking could not be prevented because of the inadequacy of police and gendarme on the island, and the shortage of military corps in Erdek³⁷.

34 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2654-63, p.3-4.

35 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2694-97, p.1.

36 BOA, *DH.ŞFR* 409-46, p.1.

37 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2715-64, p.1.

Later, when it was heard that the Greeks in Preme (Karşıyaka) on the Kapıdağ peninsula were promoting Greece's annexation of Crete and threatening the Muslims in the region, a more thorough investigation was carried out by local military officials. During these investigations it was discovered that weapons and ammunitions that was first unloaded on the Ekinlik Island by large Greek kayaks was then distributed to the Greek villages of Paşalimanı, the township of Preme (Karşıyaka) in Kapıdağ and various other villages with small rowing boats. In this way, every Gras rifle together with twenty bullets that reached the Marmara coasts were delivered to trustees of the church to be sold for monthly installments of 30 kuruş and the church would receive one meci diye for each of the rifles sold³⁸. Initially, the governor of Erdek considered confiscating this large number of weapons, but because almost all the local residents were Greek he was concerned about being confronted with their resistance during the searches. However, if he ignored these activities, according to the governor of Erdek the state would lose all its authority here and the residents of the islands would become "uncontrollable." In view of this, the governor-on the condition that the international political conjuncture allowed-proposed that the state should "show its power" by deploying soldiers to the islands by ships, and would therefore prevent incidents of "disloyalty and indiscipline"³⁹.

The governor of Karesi objected to the Erdek governor's idea of confiscating the illegal weapons on the grounds that this could cause an uprising in the region, and suggested searching those who were found carrying or suspected of carrying the rifles. Unless there was intelligence regarding the whereabouts of the weapons, a general search of a residence would be a violation of the presumption of ownership law. In addition, the individual search of all the residences would require a significant increase in the numbers of gendarme in the region, but despite the repeated requests so far there had been no arrangements made concerning this in the gendarmerie forces. Like the governor of Karesi, Mustafa Azmi Bey, governor of Hüdavendigâr also pointed out the shortage of security forces, and repeating that they faced many issues due to the lack of gendarme in places such as Erdek, Gönen and Ayvalık where non-Muslims of the Sanjak lived, requested an increase of the allowance allocated for gendarme forces. The Sanjak of Karesi was one of the most strategic part of the province whose population consisted of a variety of people and therefore required special attention in terms of security. In view of this, immediate restructuring was required within the gendarme forces in the Sanjak of Karesi⁴⁰.

38 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2750-90, p.1.

39 BOA, *DH.ŞFR* 409-46, p.1.

40 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2735-22, p.1.

In February 1909, just when the necessary measures were under discussion the Ministry of War received a letter saying Christians on the Marmara Island were acting in a way that could threaten the safety of the Muslim people⁴¹. This letter underlined the lack of security on the Marmara Island and included statements such as “There is a government office, but no security forces/government itself.” It conveyed the pressure put on the Muslims by Christians since the declaration of the constitution and blames these incidents becoming more frequent on the government failing to react. Consequently, he requested that officials and soldiers were sent to the island, and also a torpedo boat to be deployed as police control point. The owner of this letter claimed that Christians on the Ekinlik Island were gathering in the church armed then attacking the Muslims, and expressed his concern saying “God forbid, if there is any trouble here we cannot even send a telegraph, they will trample all over us.”⁴².

When the government received the letter, the Ministry of Internal Affairs instructed the Hüdavendigâr provincial administration to investigate the affair⁴³. The Erdek district governor admitted that pro-Greek demonstrations were staged on the islands for a while, and because almost all the residents on the Marmara and surrounding islands were Greek, Greek propaganda on these islands was clearly visible, and confirmed that because the south Marmara islands had not been brought under control completely the Greek people here were “really got spoiled” and had been purchasing illegal weapons in large quantities for quite a while. In fact, as defined in the letter a few days earlier a brawl broke out between the Greeks and Turkish officials on the Ekinlik Island and because of this the “Muslims were anxious.” The Erdek district governor said these incidents were due to the “failure and inadequacy” of the local administration, and securing public order with 3-4 gendarme in the Marmara and Paşalimanı townships and surrounding islands was impossible. The district governor thought it necessary to increase the number and salary of gendarme to maintain public order in regions where there was a concentrated Christian population and was a possibility of them displaying “actions of disloyalty.” Moreover, a fast patrol gunboat was essential in protecting these islands, that were so far from the central township, from the sea. According to the Erdek district governor effective measures of this kind were the only means of preventing the residents of the Marmara Islands being influenced by the Greek nationalism movements.⁴⁴

41 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2754-34, p.3.

42 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2754-34, p.2.

43 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2754-34, p.4; BOA, *DH.MKT* 2764-31, p.1.

44 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2764-31, p.2-3; BOA, *DH.ŞFR* 410-121, p.1. Although the Naval Ministry gave instructions for a steamboat to be sent to the region upon these requests of local officials, they received response saying there was “no vessel available to send to the region.”

Azmi Bey, the governor of Hüdavendigâr was of the same opinion as the Erdek district governor. The governor, who also suggested that the inadequacy of gendarme was the cause of the lack of public order and law enforcement in the Marmara and Paşalimanı townships, and that the heads of these townships were powerless under the circumstances, said it would be unsuitable in every aspect to “leave these townships uncontrolled” in the approaching Easter period. Furthermore, in the same way that it was not possible for gendarme to be sent from the township of Erdek, it was also unfeasible to deploy security forces to the islands from the provincial center because there were already inadequate numbers of gendarme in the province. Azmi Bey believed that although gendarme was allocated to the region from various regions of the province temporarily due to the oncoming Easter period, the issue had to be solved urgently in order to ensure permanent law and order⁴⁵.

Although it was decided upon request to reorganize the gendarme forces with the funds to be included in the oncoming r.1325 budget⁴⁶, it appears that this did not occur because when the people of the Paşalimanı and Ekinlik Islands objected to the collection of revenues in June, the local officials were forced to request gendarme reinforcement and a gunboat to be allocated to the region⁴⁷. Under these conditions, on 23 June 1909 the Erdek district governor sailed to the Paşalimanı Island with a military detachment to intervene in the incidents⁴⁸. Moreover, the governor arrested the perpetrators and referred them to the court. But the court simply took their statements then released the offenders, and some of the Greeks who were released fled to America.⁴⁹ Taking the latest events into consideration, the Sublime Porte decided to appoint two police squadrons to the Erdek township and a squadron each to the Marmara, Paşalimanı and Edincik districts⁵⁰.

In August, the gendarme reorganization that was included in the r.1325 budget had not yet begun in the Sanjak of Karesi. The deputy governor of Karesi was complaining that protests were surfacing in every part of the sanjak because the reorganization of the gendarme forces had not been executed for whatever reason, and the inadequacy of the existing number

BOA, *DH.MKT* 2784-36.

45 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2790-93, p.1-2.

46 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2764-31, p.4.

47 BOA, *BEO* 3565-267358; BOA, *BEO* 3565-267357, p.3-4; BOA, *DH.MKT* 2856-44, p.1.

48 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2856-44, p.1.

49 The governor who conveyed his discomfort regarding the issue, also pointed out that there were complaints about the “biased approach” of the appeals department in the region. BOA, *DH.MKT* 2863-42, p.1.

50 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2883-1, p.1.

of gendarmerie⁵¹. On the other hand, although the Naval Ministry decided in September that the repairs of the Sayyad-i Derya gunboat in the Imperial Shipyard should be completed and sent to the region⁵² in a short time it emerged that the gunboat had already been deployed to another region. The governor of Karesi persistently requested a fast boat that would be based at the Erdek port and constantly patrol the coasts of the Karabiga and Kapıdağ peninsula and the Marmara, Paşalimanı and Ekinlik Islands to be sent immediately. As there were only two gendarmes in each of the Marmara and Paşalimanı townships, and one gendarme on the Ekinlik Island, the governor of Karesi insisted that the issues regarding the steamship and gendarme reorganization should be employed at the shortest possible date⁵³.

In all likelihood, after this the requests of the local officials were fulfilled because there was a decrease in weapon trafficking and peace prevailed for two years. Nevertheless, the sale of illegal weapons and ammunition was revived again during the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars that led to an increase of Greek nationalism among the Anatolian Greeks. After the war began, in December 1912 the Nevşehir gunboat was deployed to the region in an attempt of preventing any potential trafficking activities in the Marmara Sea and a reinforcement of gendarmerie were sent to the Sanjak of Karesi. But because the Nevşehir gunboat only sailed to the Karesi coasts once a month instead of constantly patrolling the area, efforts to prevent illegal trafficking were unsuccessful⁵⁴. In the same way that the Greek kayaks were used as a means of propaganda and communication to provoke the Greeks living on the Marmara coasts, these kayaks also played a major role in the sales of illegal merchandise to the Bulgarian military particularly when the Bulgarian army reached Çatalca⁵⁵. This trade was carried out by the Greeks residing the south Marmara Islands⁵⁶. It became apparent that illegal merchandise was shipped to the Bulgarian army from Dersaadet (Istanbul) via Kallikrateia, so to prevent this each of the torpedo boats in the Bosphorus Straits began to patrol in the Marmara Sea in a ten-day rotation to inspect these boats⁵⁷. Subsequently, the governor of Erdek was sent to inspect the region. As a result of the inspections carried out by the governor-as reported for many years-he repeated that the only means of securing law and order on the islands was with a ship constantly patrolling the seas in the area and the

51 BOA, *DH.MUI* 4-2 - 56, p.4.

52 BOA, *DH.MKT* 2857-99.

53 BOA, *DH.MUI* 4-2 - 56, p.3.

54 Efiloğlu, *ibid*, p.26-31.

55 Efiloğlu, *ibid*, p.22.

56 Efiloğlu, *ibid*, p.24-26.

57 BOA, *DH.SYS* 112-9, p.34.

necessity of deploying a gunboat to the region immediately⁵⁸. Although the decision was given to send the Nevşehir gunboat to the Erdek coasts after the repairs were complete, there were no boats in shipyard to send⁵⁹, and the command to inspect the coasts with torpedo and steamboats was only issued after World War I broke out.⁶⁰

In World War I-particularly during the Battle of Gallipoli-the Marmara shores were exposed to attacks by the allied forces⁶¹. Moreover, Greece settled on the Aegean islands before the war and therefore shared borders with the Western Anatolian shores. After this period, Greece not only began military preparations, but also supported gang activities on the Anatolian coasts. This table worsened even further with the Ottoman State being included in World War I; as a result of the Greek and Armenian uprisings and these acting together with the enemy states the Ottomans were forced to drive the “corrupt” subjects out of the critical points of the combat zones⁶². In this context, it was agreed that some of the people living on the coasts of the Marmara Sea should be evacuated in order to restore security in the Gallipoli strait. During this process, the Marmara Islands, particularly those close to the mouth of the straits and were at a vital point in terms of sea transportation were evacuated. As the Greek residents here assisted the Bulgarian army by supplying illegal weapons during the Balkan Wars, this made evacuating the islands inevitable to ensure the safety of the Istanbul and Gallipoli shipments. In this context, the Greek population on the south Marmara islands in the months of June-July 1915 was moved from the coasts to the inland parts of the provinces.⁶³ Therefore, by July 1915 the relocation process on the Marmara islands was complete to a large extent, and in September some of the Greek population in Erdek was also moved due to similar reasons.⁶⁴So preventing illegal trafficking and maintaining law and order on the islands in question was only possible after the relocation application in the South Marmara islands, and the Kapıdağ and Erdek regions that were an extension of these islands.

58 BOA, *DH.İD* 197-8, p.3-4.

59 BOA, *DH.İD* 197-8, p.6.

60 BOA, *DH.ŞFR* 41-158. However, in a few weeks the Musul torpedo boat left Erdek and assigned to Çanakkale and once again the region was in need of a torpedo/gunboat BOA, *DH.ŞFR* 430-91.

61 Efiloğlu, *ibid*, p.325.

62 Efiloğlu, *ibid*, p.369-372.

63 In principle, as the government was concerned that could arise between the Muslims and Greeks, when avoidable they did not allow Greeks to settle in Muslim villages. Nevertheless, as the government policy of resettling those moved from the Marmara coasts to the inland parts of the same province, in some circumstances relocating them in Muslim villages was inevitable. Efiloğlu, *Ibid*. pp.441-442; Mustafa Özdemir, “I. Dünya Savaşı Sırasında Osmanlı Devleti Tarafından Gerçekleştirilen Rum Tehciri”, *ÇTTAD*, 6/14 (2007), p.33.

64 Groups moved to the inland parts of the province with ships allocated by the military were then transported from here by vehicles to their final settling places. Efiloğlu, *ibid*, p.398-400, 438-440.

Conclusion

In time, the South Marmara islands in the northwest of the Kapıdağ Peninsula consisting of fourteen islands, four of which are inhabited and which stood out as a transit center for trade until the mid-19th century, were transformed into an arms trafficking center when Greece gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1832. Especially after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, when the political atmosphere in the Balkans that was already tense was kindled even further; attempts of materializing the vision of expanding Greece resulted in the Greek population on the Marmara islands taking up arms with the intention of uniting with Greece. As a result, after this period the south Marmara islands that give the appearance of a natural extension of the Bandırma-Erdek region emerged as a stopover on the transportation route for arms trafficking.

Although the Ottoman bureaucratic mechanism was aware of the region becoming a frequented point for illegal arms trade since the very beginning owing to the information conveyed by local officials, because of the financial difficulties the empire experienced at the time the governments were ineffective in taking the necessary measures and therefore ending this illegal trade. The Ottoman administration was unsuccessful in increasing the total number of gendarmerie on the islands to more than four throughout the 19th century, and failed to fulfill the demand for a high-speed gunboat requested for years by local officials to constantly patrol the area and protect the islands. It would not be wrong to say that in addition to financial difficulties, another factor that led to a delay in taking the necessary measures was that compared with issues regarding law and order in other regions the south Marmara Islands were considered to be closer to the capital and therefore easier to control. As a result, the south Marmara Islands only gained vital importance in terms of the administrative headquarters in 1915 by becoming a frontline when the Gallipoli front was opened following attacks by Allied Powers, and arms trafficking eventually ended with the relocation of Greeks in 1915.

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