

**BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA REFUGEES IN THE 19th and 20th
CENTURIES IN THE LIGHT OF OTTOMAN DOCUMENTS**

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Abstract

One of the most tragic events in human history, migration, no doubt, left deep traces on communities who were forced to perform it. Some of the migrations are caused by natural causes such as earthquake, flood, famine, disease and some of them originating from the wars. One of the biggest causes of migrations that occurred in the Balkans was war. After 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War large-scale migration took place from Balkans to Anatolia. According to the Treaty of Berlin signed after the war in which Ottoman Empire was defeated, Bosnia and Herzegovina which was the most important territory of Ottoman Empire in the Balkans was left to Austro-Hungarian Empire. Bosnians, the Muslim population of Bosnia-Herzegovina, over this situation began to migrate to Anatolia.

In this study, it will be focused on issues such as the general situation of refugees who migrated from Bosnia and Herzegovina to various cities of Anatolia, security of relocation in light of the Ottoman documents. Besides information about Ottoman Empire policies against refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and living conditions of refugees will be provided.

Keywords: *Bosnia-Herzegovina, Refugees, Ottoman.*

Immigration is changing the society lived and social environment, joining to another environment, to a strange environment and community as a result of natural, economical, political or similar obligations or with the intention of a better orientation to new conditions of a person.¹

The immigrations that occurred during the history, as being the strongest element of social changes, involve the societies with each other that have different physical structure, religion, culture and languages, and cause them to live together and thus interact with each other. New races, cultures, administration and life styles merged with the effect of immigrations and it paved the way for forming the todays

¹ H. Yıldırım Ağanoğlu, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Balkanların Makûs Talihi: Göç*, İstanbul, 2012, p.23.

societies. This opinion, being valid for all over the world except some regions, especially consisting of the remote past and recent past.¹

The reasons of the migrations being various, they rest more upon the economical reasons. When population growth and production of food are not at the same rate, people are forced to migrate to more fertilized places that they can obtain their food needs and an immigration chain occurs as a result.²

The second main reason of the migrations in 19. Century is the religion and nationality discrimination. These types of migrations emerge as a result of an ethnic group who have chosen a specific place as a country and hold the power of politics, giving another people of ethnic origin and religious groups the right to live with them.³

Migration is the main reason of cultural changes. Since, it is necessary to adopt the traditions and customs of each other or at least to accept that the other group may have same traditions and behaviours to live all together with the different migrants and native population who have different traditions, attitudes or behaviours. Migration changes both the migrants and the place where people put down roots. But the mentioned cohesion and adoption of the different behaviours and attitudes don't come into being by itself. For creating a mutual tolerance atmosphere, helps of the leaders, social and economical tools is very important as well as the government policy and civil institutions.⁴

1877-78 Ottoman Empire- Russian War known as the '93 War in the history, actually is one of the biggest reasons of the migration from the Balkans to Anatolia. At the end of the war, the Ottoman Empire was defeated and Russia achieved a great dominance in Balkans with the Agreement of Ayastefanos signed in 3 March 1878 between Russia and Ottoman Empire.⁵ But this agreement caused the interventions of Austria that didn't want a big Bulgaria in Balkans founded under the effects of Russia and England who was anxious about the roads to the colonies in India to be effected from the Russian threat and Straits falling under the hegemony of Russia. As a result of the determined attitudes of England and Austria, Russia accepted the idea of holding an international conference in Berlin and Berlin Agreement was signed in 13 of July convening in the Berlin Convention in 13 June 1878.⁶

¹ Kemal H. Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler*, İstanbul, 2010, p. 9.

² Kemal H. Karpat, *ibid*, p. 76

³ Kemal H. Karpat, *ibid*, p. 77, 78.

⁴ Kemal H. Karpat, *ibid*, p. 82.

⁵ Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, V. VIII, Ankara 1983, p. 64.

⁶ Ahmet Halaçoğlu, "Balkanlar'dan Anadolu'ya Yönelik Göçler", *Türkler Ansiklopedisi*, V. 13, Ankara, 2002, p. 887-895; see M. Celâleddin Paşa, *Mir'ât-ı Hakikat*, Haz. İsmet Miroğlu, İstanbul, 1983, p. 575-581.

Ottoman Empire had to leave Bosnia Herzegovina to Austria- Hungary with the 25. clause of Berlin Agreement.¹ But the territories of the country being governed by Austria-Hungary, would constitute a part of Ottoman Empire legally.²

Bosnia Herzegovina being invaded by Austria-Hungary which was a Christian government affacet negatively especially the Bosnians.³ Bosnians, being Bosnian Muslims, diverge from Christian Slavic people as religion and culture but at the same time they talk the same language. This divergence doesn't only rely on religious elements; it also has a rooted past that reaches to the depths of history. Bosnians are always different from Orthodox Serbians and Catholic Croats as ethnicity and religion.⁴ They become Christian but always remain royal to the 'Bogomilism' communion which is the closest communion of the Christianity to Islam.⁵

During the second half of the 19. century and at the beginnings of the 20. century, the migrations from Bosnia can be said to occur at four different periods and stages. All of the migrations arised from the threats by the governments of Serbia and Austria headed towards the religious-cultural heritages of Muslims and several pressures like the benefit-oriented attitudes of the landowners. Each of them being a result of special affairs, the migrations from Bosnia was generally not ocured by the consents of of people but by force.⁶

The first migration that we can name also as 'Muslim' migration more than 'Bosnian' migration because also the Turks and Albanians took part, started in 1876, not at a time but in several waves. Bosnia Herzegovina Riot (Herzegovina Riot) in 1875, Wars of 1876-77 Ottoman-Serbian and 1877-88 Ottoman Russian(the '93 War) caused this migration. During this period, the number of Muslims forced to leave their native lands mandatorily was too many; but the Bosnians who hoped that Ottoman would dominate Bosnia again and they could turn back to their lands were very few who emigrated permanently after migration.⁷

To understand the effects of the migration better, it is necessary to research that where and how the migrans were housed. The migrants adopting to the new environment, socializing and plating a part in creating a new society are widely tied to housing policy. Despite the Ottoman Empire had undergone several changes in the middle of the 19. century, 'Migrant Commissions' were founded which was seen as an important foundation. These commissions disscussing the problems of housing with several aspects, dwelt on the issues of tax and military service,

¹ Orhan Sakin, *Osmanlı'da Etnik Yapı ve 1914 Nüfusu*, İstanbul, p. 64.

² Yılmaz Öztuna, *Büyük Osmanlı Tarihi*, V.5, İstanbul, 1994, p. 319-320.

³ Muammer Demirel, "Türkiye'de Bosna Göçmenleri", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, V. 12, Is. 2, Erzurum, 2008, s. 286-306.

⁴ Orhan Sakin, *ibid*, 60.

⁵ Muammer Demirel, *aforementioned article*, p. 286; Orhan Sakin, *ibid*, 61.

⁶ Kemal H. Karpat, *ibid*, p.261.

⁷ Kemal H. Karpat, *ibid*, p.261-262.

determined the acreage of the farmlands, specified the acreages of the fields that would be given per family according to the fertility of the fields.¹

When the collective applications of migrating to the lands of Ottoman Empire by Bosnian Muslims to the Ottoman Government, the issue was discussed at the council of ministers in the date of 27 April 1879. In this discussion, many inconveniences were estimated in case the mass migration of 400.000 Bosnian Muslims to the lands of Ottoman Empire. Before anything else, it was determined that it was impossible to cover all the expenses of migration, food, housing and other expenses of the migrants by the government. It was important for the Ottoman Empire and Muslims of Balkans that the Muslims staying in Bosnia Herzegovina in terms of strategy. Deserting the fertile farms created a situation against the Bosnian Muslims economically. Because of these reasons preventing the mass migration of the Bosnian Muslims, but migrating the ones who wanted to migrate from Salonica to Anatolia by troopships regardless of everything, helping for the issues of housing and covering the expenses by the helps of society and from the state treasury were decided.²

After the occupation of Bosnia Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary, an increase in migration waves were observed during especially the periods of political disturbances at specific times. Muslims were the ones who affected mostly from these migration waves. At the beginning, these migrations were restricted to former Turkish officials and some influential Muslims who saw themselves at the risk before the new administration. But the military service law entered in force in the year of 1881 resulted with the mass migrations between the Muslims that would continue till 1883. The failed riot attempt erupted in 1882 and in which the Muslims partly took part also played an important role in this migration wave. The migrations relatively settled between the years of 1893 and 1899 started to increase again later and reached to the highest level in the year of 1900. Only in 1901, this intensive migration wave was stopped with the precautions taken by state government. Although nevertheless, Serbian Orthodox population showed waves at the annual migration numbers, the migration of the Serbs felt very much behind the migration of Muslims.³

It is very hard to determine the number of migrants from Bosnia Herzegovina to the lands of Ottoman Empire from the available sources. In some sources, the number of Bosnian migrants to Ottoman Empire between the years of 1882-1900 is mentioned as 120.000, in some of them, it is estimated as 300.000. But the calculations done by taking the demographic development after the population

¹ Kemal H. Karpat, *ibid*, p.101.

² BOA, YA RES, 3/7; *Bosna-Hersek ile İlgili Arşiv Belgeleri (1516-1919)*, Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, 1992, p.82-85, 412-414. Also see Muammer Demirel, *aforementioned article*, p. 287

³ Aydın Babuna, *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu Geçmişten Günümüze Boşnaklar*, (trans., Hayati Torun), İstanbul, 2000, p. 27.

census into consideration shows the number of the migrants as 150.000 person.¹ However it seems very hard to determine the net number of the migrants with the available sources. Because it is highly likely that there were some migrants that settled in the lands of the Ottoman without being subjected to any systems or recorded.

II. Abdulhamit, the sultan of the Ottoman Empire, acted with the belief of it was necessary to protect the Muslims in the Balkans that took place in the environment of Turkish culture. At the same time, the workforce that the migrant would provide was important in scope of bringing the uncultivated lands in Anatolia to economy. For this reason II. Abdulhamit involved closely with all the problems such as transportation, temporary housing and housing of migrants. In this period, "Migrant Commission" being in the first place, "General Migrant Commission" and "Migrant Office of Housing" was founded.²

On the date of 20 April 1882 Sultan II. Abdulhamit tried to house thousands of Bosnian migrants that gathered around Istanbul in and around Istanbul with the governmental opportunities. To that end, he wanted the new government to buy enough field only to build houses which was in the possession of Damat Ethem Pasa in Kagıthane in Istanbul and to allocate this field which was fit for cultivation and usage for housing the Bosnian migrants.³

With a document dated 31 December 1883, it was asked to provinces by Internal Affairs Ministry that how many wasteland was existed at the coastal regions of the country for the housing of the Bosnian migrants in Istanbul. Upon this request, governors of the each province informed the government about how many migrants could be housed within the provinces by sending telegraphs. As a result of the researchs made, the information of 140 domiciles in the township of Midye in Edirne, 20 domiciles in the township of Ahtabolu, 200 domiciles on the coast of Kesendire in Salonica, 100 domiciles in the township of Bartın in Kastamonu, 500 domiciles in Sinop, 700 domiciles in the township of Antalya in Konya, 1000 domiciles on the coast of Icel in Adana, 1000 domiciles in the township of Kilis in Hatay, 3000 domiciles on the coasts of Dicle and Fırat in Baghdad and 6000 domiciles in Tripoli could be housed was reached.⁴

It is easy to understand that Ottoman Empire showed special attention and concern to Bosnian migrants from the archived documents. It is understood that a close interest was taken with the migrants not only in mass housings but also at individual situations. For example, in a document dated 22 October 1888 it is stated that a migrant named Abdülkerim originally from Bosnian community who had to leave

¹ H. Yıldırım Aġanođlu, *ibid*, p.40; Aydın Babuna, *ibid*, p.27.

² Muammer Demirel, *aforementioned article*, p. 288.

³ BOA, İ.DH, 68406; Muammer Demirel, *aforementioned article*, p. 292.

⁴ BOA, DH. MKT, 1343/20; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, (Yay. Haz. H. Yıldırım Aġanođlu, Sebahattin Bayram, Mumin Yıldıztaş), Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, İstanbul, 2009, p. 276-279;.

his family behind because of the occupation of Bosnia by Austria was paid 1400 kurus that he need to bring his family to the land of Ottoman as ‘relief fund’.¹

Bosnian migrants were sent to be housed in the township of Biga of the province of Karasi in the year of 1888, but not all of them could be housed. When the migrant representatives informed this situation to the Ottoman Empire, sending a letter from Sadaret to the province of Karasi in 1 April 1888, it was asked to show the necessary sensitivity on the issue of housing and not to raise difficulties for the migrants.² At the end of the year of 1888, some of the migrants who couldn't be housed yet was sent to different migrant villages in Anatolia. On the date of December 1888, a new order was sent to the relevant authorities by the government for the immediate housing of the 100 domiciles waiting to be houses in Biga.³

In the province of Ankara, 1.469 Bosnian migrants consisted of 283 domiciles was housed. On the date of 29 August 1900, there was a demand of Migrant Commission of Housing for covering the expenses of Bosnian migrants who were housed in Ankara. In this document, as it was stated that 3.290 kurus were needed in order to build houses of the migrants who were housed, for covering the living expenses like 750 kurus to each domicile for a plough ox and 150 kurus for agricultural instruments were asked to be given. Additionally, seed wheat and barley and the cost of grain were asked to be covered by the treasury.⁴

Again in the year of 1900, it was decided to house some of the Bosnian migrants around the Anatolitan railway. As 2000 liras were needed for essential needs of these migrants, 8000 liras were also needed for building their houses, grains, seeds and a plough animal. But it didn't seem possible to cover these expenses by the incomes of Ankara in the conditions of those days. This issue being reported to the relevant authorities, a decision was taken in the Council of Ministers in order to cover the expenses again with incomes of provinces.⁵

When the dates showed the year of 1901, a big increase in the number of migrants from Bosnia to Anatolia occured. It is understood that the migrants were reaching to Istanbul over Salonica. As a matter of fact, in a document dated 17 January 1901, it is stated that the number of migrants on the way to Istanbul were too much and because the transportation expenses weren't covered , these migrants were made to wait in Salonica. Additionally it is stated that the migrants couldn't stay there for a long time because of the impossibilities and they could become miserable there. But the Ministry of Finance delivered their opinions about covering the necessary expenses with the incomes of provinces.⁶

¹ BOA, DH MKT, 1567/61; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, p. 280-281

² BOA, DH. MKT, 1498/34; Muammer Demirel, *aforementioned article*, p. 297

³ BOA, DH. MKT, 1574/109; Muammer Demirel, *aforementioned article*, p. 297

⁴ A.MKT.MHM,510/27; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, p. 285-287

⁵ *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, p.288-290; MV, 101/36.

⁶ *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, p. 291-295; A.MKT.MHM, 512/5.

A document was prepared in the year of 1901 by the Migration Commission of Housing to be presented to the government, that shows the old and new names of regions that the migrants came from Bosnia and housed in Ankara and regions where they were housed and has the plans, sketches and maps of the places housed for them. In this respective document, statistical information about Bosnian migrants were also included.¹

On the other hand, as it is understood from a document dated 29 June 1901, necessary seeds were provided for the Bosnian migrants housed around Tahtakopru, Pelidcayırı, Fındıklıcukuru ve Pabuccuçayırı in the township of Inegol of the province of Hudavendigâr (Bursa).²

At the beginning of the 20. century, 40 domiciles of Bosnian migrants housed in the township of Karamursel. A mosque and a school were decided to be constructed soon after in Tahtalı in the township. Stones and timbers and labor were to be provided by the migrants, and 3000 kuru necessary for other expenses were to be covered by the government.³

On the issue of housing Bosnian migrants, Ottoman Empire made everything easier. For example, 2000kuru support were provided to a migrant named Mehmet who was housed in Trilye in Bursa in 1903 but couldn't build his house because of his poverty.⁴

For the former migrants came from Bosnia, the support of the government was also at the issue. Hence, as it is understood from a document dated 1908, an amount of salary was put on for Hoca Abdullatif Efendi who migrated from Bosnia to Karahisar-ı Saib and lost everything in a fire.⁵

The migrants housed at the field that belonged to the Monasteries of Aya Triyan and Bane before within Taslıca, after these fields registered as belonging to the monasteries, it was decided to house these migrants by transferring them to the wastelands that belonged to the government in the year of 1910.⁶

As a result, the Ottoman Empire tried to house the migrant groups to the places appropriate for housing and within a specific plan. It was targeted to increase the Muslim population there by housing some migrants to the strategically important places in Balkans and thus, to make these places safe regions. On the other hand, to create new settlements, to use wastelands for agriculture, to make the lands prosperous and fertile were again between the targets of Ottoman housing policy. Migrants mostly sent to provinces of Edirne, Aydın, Ankara, Kastamonu and

¹ BOA, Y. MTV, 218/79; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, p. 298-304

² BOA, A.MKT.MHM, 514/14; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, p. 297

³ BOA, A.MKT.MHM, 520/7; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, p. 305-309

⁴ BOA, A. MKT. MHM, 521/35; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, p. 310-312

⁵ BOA, DH. MKT, 1244/85; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, p. 313

⁶ BOA, DH. MUI, 96-1/47; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Bosna Hersek*, p. 314-315

Hudavendigâr. This caused overpopulation at first in the provinces of Izmit, Bursa and Aydın especially in the region of Western Anatolia. But however, along with determining the wastelands available for housing in Diyarbakır, Van, Musul, Halep, Baghdad and Basra, because of some reasons such as being far from Istanbul and Rumelia, not finding the transportation network sufficient, the climate not being suitable for the migrants and reactions of non-muslims, migrants weren't housed to these places as masses.¹

On the other hand the migration of Bosnian Muslims, made the ties of affection an inseparable bridge between Turkey and Bosnia Herzogevina. In spite of the insufficient possibilities of the Ottoman Empire in 19. century, Bosnian migrants were helped with all the possibilities. In spite of the devoted helps, migrants also suffered intolerable challenges. For example, the mosques and similar mass shelters that were used until the permanent housing were insufficient in terms of sanitation, these places caused diseases for migrants.²

Today it is possible to see Bosnian migrants at every corner of Anatolia. Bosnian Muslim made great contributions to the richness of Anatolia in many aspects. As they contributed to the development of trade in the cities and agricultural activities in the countryside, they also enriched our social life in cultural aspect.³

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¹ Nedim İpek, *Rumeli'den Anadolu'ya Türk Göçleri (1877-1890)*, Ankara, 1999, p. 238.

² Muammer Demirel, *aforementioned article*, p. 298-299.

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