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ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ – RESEARCH ARTICLE

# DEFENDING THE BALKAN FRONTIER: THE ORGANIZATION OF MILITARY COLONIES IN THE 19TH-CENTURY OTTOMAN BOSNIA

**Mehmet ÇETİN***

## ABSTRACT

During the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, frontier organizations played a crucial role in defending against external invasions and supporting further conquests. As the state's expansion focused westward, the Balkan frontier became a key strategic area, with a border organization heavily reliant on the participation of non-Muslims. However, in response to the disruptive influences of the French Revolution and the interventions of Western powers, the Ottoman frontier policy - which had long been shaped by cooperation with local elements- began to evolve into new organizational models. Although numerous studies adress the pre-modern Balkan frontier and 19th-century military and administrative reforms, the innovative measures to secure these borders remain unexplored. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the implementation of the military colony system in the Bosnian frontier during the 19th century, utilizing primary sources. Bosnia's particular challenges in military recruitment further underscore the significance of this topic. The findings demonstrate that the colonial militia system, though applied within a limited scope and during a brief period, was a pivotal step in the evolution of regular Ottoman border forces, laying the groundwork for the establishment of organized and sustainable frontier defence.

**Keywords:** Military Colony, Ottoman Empire, Balkan Frontier.

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MEHMET ÇETİN

# BALKAN SERHADDİNİ SAVUNMAK: 19. YÜZYIL OSMANLI BOSNASI'NDA ASKERİ KOLONİLERİN ORGANİZASYONU


## ÖZ

Serhad teşkilatı, genişleme dönemi Osmanlı Devleti'nde düşman istilâlarını karşılamada ve yeni fetih hareketlerinde önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Devletin genişlemesi Batı'ya doğru odaklandıkça, Balkan serhaddi, gayrimüslimlerin yoğun katılımını içeren sınır teşkilatı ile önemli bir stratejik alan haline gelmiştir. Ancak Fransız Devrimi'nin yıkıcı etkileri ve Batılı güçlerin müdahalelerine karşılık, uzun süredir yerel unsurların işbirliği ile şekillenenen serhad politikası, yeni örgütlenme modellerine doğru evrilmiştir. Modern Dönem öncesi Balkan serhaddini ve 19. yüzyılda bölgedeki idari ve askeri reformları konu alan çok sayıda çalışma olmasına rağmen, sınır boylarının muhafazasına yönelik yeni girişimler yeterince ele alınmamıştır. Bu çalışma, birincil kaynaklar yardımıyla 19. yüzyılda Bosna sınırında askeri koloni sisteminin uygulanmasını inceleyerek bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bosna'nın asker alımında zorluklar yaşanan bir bölge olması konunun önemini daha da vurgulamaktadır. Bulgular sınırlı kapsamda ve kısa bir süre için uygulanabilmesine rağmen koloni-militer yönteminin düzenli sınır birliklerinin teşkilinde önemli bir adım olduğunu ve örgütlü ve sürdürülebilir sınır savunmasının kurulmasına zemin hazırladığını göstermektedir.


**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Koloni militer yöntemi, Osmanlı Devleti, Balkan Serhaddi.

## Introduction

The term *serhad* in the Ottoman Empire referred to the border region with neighboring states,[1] characterized by fortifications and ongoing conflict. Lacking fixed boundaries, it was a zone of limited sovereignty.[2] The serhad organization aimed to counter invasions, weaken the enemy through raids, and disrupt its logistics.[3] As the empire expanded, frontier troops shifted to new borders, making these regions a springboard for further conquests.[4]

[1] Osman Gümüşçü, "Siyasi Coğrafya Açısından Sınırlar ve Tarihi Süreç İçinde Türkiye'de Sınır Kavramı", *Bilig*, No. 52, Winter 2010, p. 80.
[2] Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery*, State University of New York Press, New York 1994, p. 12; Mark Stein, *Guarding the Frontier: Ottoman Border Forts and Garrisons in Europe*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York 2007, p. 13; Andrew Peacock, *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, p. 11-12.
[3] Halil İnalcık, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde Uc (Serhad)lar", *Doğu Batı, Makaleler II*, (prep.) Taşkın Takış ve Sunay Aksoy, Doğu Batı Yayınları, Ankara 2008, p. 54.
[4] Gümüşçü, *op.cit.*, s. 86.

The Ottoman Empire emerged as a Balkan power,[5] valuing the region for its strategic importance.[6] Before the 16th century, with Muslims and Turks in the minority, the frontier organization relied heavily on non-Muslims.[7] As expansion ended in the late 16th century, the focus shifted to territorial preservation.[8] In response to 17th-century military developments, the Ottomans decentralized their military, increasing reliance on ayans and provincial forces.[9] After 1700, they replaced centralized defense with contractual alliances, as seen in the Danube Principalities and Crimea, while supporting volunteer warrior communities.[10] In the late 18th century, the Ottoman Empire faced defeats by Russia and Austria, nationalist uprisings, and Western-backed independence movements, straining its ties with local forces. In response, it pursued an internal balance policy to curb regional powers resisting centralization.[11] While military control shifted to the central authority, paramilitary forces remained key in defending the *serhads*.[12] The oppressive rule of local elements, including fortress guards, fueled rebellions, which were countered by paramilitary forces.[13]

The literature regarding the administration, economy, military infrastructure and defence of the frontiers in different parts of the Ottoman Empire is gradually expanding. Nevertheless, most of these studies focus on the period before the 19th century. In this context, this study aims to

[5] İlber Ortaylı, *Osmanlı Barışı*, Da Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2003, p. 39.
[6] Halil İnalcık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Ekonomik ve Sosyal Tarihi*, Cilt: 1, (ed.) Halil İnalcık ve Donald Quatert, Eren Yayınları, İstanbul 2004, p. 313-321.
[7] Evgeni Radushev, "Ottoman border periphery (serhad) in the Nikopol Vilayet, first half of the sixteenth century", *Études balkaniques*, No. 3-4, 1995, p. 158-159; Ufuk Gülsoy, *Cizyeden Vatandaşlığa Osmanlı'nın Gayrimüslim Askerleri*, Timaş Yayınları, İstanbul 2010, p. 22.
[8] Gabor Agoston, "Ottoman Conquest", *The Encyclopedia of War*, (ed.) Gordon Martel, Blackwell Publishing, United Kingdom 2012, p. 2.
[9] Gabor Agoston, "Empires and Warfare in East-Central Europe, 1550-1750: the Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry and Military Transformation", *European Warfare, 1350-1750*, (ed.) Frank Tallett, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, p. 115.
[10] Virginia Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870, An Empire Besieged*, Routledge, London and New York 2013, p. 487.
[11] Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats, The Ottoman Route to State Centralization*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1994, p. 2-18.
[12] Mehmet Çetin Börekçi, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sırp Meselesi*, Kutup Yıldızı Yayınları, İstanbul 2001, p. 25, 26.; Aksan, *op. cit.*, p. 333-334; Rossitsa Gradeva, "Between Hinterland and Frontier: Ottoman Vidin, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 156, 2009, p. 6.
[13] Şevket Pamuk, *Osmanlı-Türkiye İktisadi Tarihi, 1500-1914*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2007, p. 200-201.

contribute to the literature by addressing an initiative put forward in the defense of the Balkan frontier during a period that was particularly turbulent for both the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans in the 19th century, illustrated by the examples of Austria, Russia and Sweden. The first introduction of this procedure into Ottoman thinking took place in 1849, and its implementation was only possible in the 1860s. This periodisation constitutes a rational boundary for the subheadings of the study. In the following part of the study, the developments that necessitated the realization of such a procedure in the frontier tribes will be presented within the framework of 19th-century Balkan history; then, different examples of the colonial-military procedure in Western countries will be given. In the fourth part, the process of establishing the colonial-military procedure in the Ottoman Empire will be analysed based on primary sources.

## 1. Mid-19th Century Nationalist Movements, Revolts and Dissolution in the Balkans

The 19th century was a period in which national identity was constructed, and separatist uprisings occurred in the Balkans due to the emergence of a bourgeois class enriched through trade, the strengthening of local feudal elements, the effects of the French Revolution, the support and incitement of the church and Western countries, and finally the gradual loss of authority of the central government in the region.[14] The failure of the Second Siege of Vienna provided a favourable environment for the development of nationalist movements in the Balkan Peninsula. After the failure in the Second Siege of Vienna, the Ottoman administration began to lose its authority in the region. Following the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) and the Treaty of Passarowitz (1718), trade conducted by Russia and Austria in the Danube region increased significantly. This growth, driven by concessions granted by the Ottoman Empire, contributed to the rise of a commercial bourgeoisie among the Balkan nations.[15]

From the 17th century, prolonged wars strained the Ottoman budget, allowing ayans and local notables to dominate tax collection, leading to

[14] Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Volume 1, Cambridge University Press, USA 1995, p. 171-193; İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2005, p. 59-87.
[15] Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun…*, p. 48, 59.

corruption.[16] Abuses by local beys drove non-Muslim merchants to evade taxes and trade with the Habsburgs. Balkan Orthodox merchants prospered from Russian trade privileges under the 1774 Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji and France's decline in the Levant.[17] Western Europe's industrial growth turned Ottoman provinces into raw material suppliers and markets for manufactured goods, enriching Balkan merchants.[18] Meanwhile, the Christian peasantry, primarily identifying by religion, generally accepted Ottoman rule, with occasional socio-economic protests targeting local elites rather than the central government.[19]

The Orthodox church, which became an institution of the Ottoman center after the conquest of Istanbul, was accepted as the representative of the Orthodox population not only by the state but also by the Orthodox people. This is why they directed their criticisms and accusations to the local ruling class rather than to the state in general. Until the emergence of national movements, the Church protected the Christian community ideologically. Nevertheless, the acquisition of a dominant position within the Orthodox nation by the wealthy and, therefore, mighty Greek Phanariot administration in the 18th century was among the first steps of the Bulgarian, Serbian and Romanian national movements, which sought to erase Greek influence and replace it with their national identity.[20].The Greeks formed the bourgeoisie in the major cities of the Balkans and not only influenced other Balkan bourgeoisies, but also became instruments for spreading national consciousness. This situation diminished the prominence of Balkan Orthodox ethnic identities. It led to the dissolution of the Millet System, which made it possible for religious groups to develop their political identity within their religious identity.[21]

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[16] Georges Castellan, *History of the Balkans, From Mohammed the Conquerer to Stalin,* (trans.) Nicholas Bradley, Columbia University Press, New York 1992*,* p. 217; Evguenia Davidova, *Nation-States, Through the Eyes of Three Generations of Merchants (1780s-1890s)*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2013, p. 13-14; Castellan, *op.cit.*, p. 273-275.

[17] Thanos Veremis, *A Modern History of the Balkans, Nationalism and Identity in Southeast Europe*, I. B. Tauris, London - New York 2017, p. 9.

[18] Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun…*, p. 59.

[19] Veremis, *op.cit.*, p. 11-12.

[20] Jelavich, *op cit.*, p. 53-57; Kemal Karpat, *Balkanlarda Osmanlı Mirası ve Ulusçuluk*, (trans.) Recep Boztemur, İmge Yayınevi, Ankara 2004, p.14, 21, 24.

[21] Edouard-Philippe Engelhardt, *La Turquie et le Tanzimat ou Histoire des Réformes dans L'Empire Ottoman*, Troisiéme Partie, A. Cotillon, Paris 1882, p. 154-156; Şennur Şenel, "19. ve 20. Yüzyılların Denge Oyununda Balkanlar", *Balkanlar El Kitabı*, Vol. I, (prep.) Osman Karatay and Bilgehan A. Gökdağ, Karam Yayınları, Çorum/Ankara 2006, p. 402-403; Davidova, *op.cit.*, p. 14-15.

The French Revolution introduced nationalism as the foundation of the state, reshaping identities in the Balkans, where religious affiliation had previously been dominant under the Millet System.[22] Revolutionary ideas spread through political culture, the Balkan commercial diaspora, and local radicalism, influenced by Panslavism- a movement promoting Slavic unity and a key Russian strategy for Balkan expansion.[23] Western powers pursued their own interests; Russia, lacking direct access to open seas, saw the Balkans as geopolitically vital, while Austria, after annexing Dalmatia in the Treaty of Campo Formio, focused on Bosnia-Herzegovina to secure its territorial links with Croatia, Slovenia, and Dalmatia.[24] The 19th-century centralist reforms, including the Tanzimat Edict, aimed to foster Ottoman unity through legal equality but instead fueled Balkan uprisings.[25] Peasant revolts surged as unmet expectations led to unrest, exacerbated by unresolved tax and land issues, regional abuses, and banditry.[26] Non-Muslim intellectuals, disappointed by unfulfilled representation promises in the Tanzimat and Imperial Reform Edict,[27] spearheaded nationalist movements, leveraging increased rights and Western-backed opportunities. Meanwhile, Balkan Muslim communities resisted reforms that threatened their previous privileges.[28]

The Balkan Christian independence movements followed three stages: national awakening, internationalization with the support of great

[22] Jelavich, *op.cit.*, p. 174; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford University Press, New York-Oxford 1996, p. 178; Bilal Eryılmaz, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Gayrimüslim Tebaanın Yönetimi*, Risale Yayınları, İstanbul 1990, p. 171.

[23] Veremis, *op.cit.*, p. 11-12; Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Vol. V, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 1994, p. 27; Mithat Aydın, "Bosna-Hersek Ayaklanması (1875)'nda Panslavizmin Etkisi ve Sırbistan ve Karadağ'ın Rolü", *Belleten*, Vol. 69, No. 256, 2005, p. 913-; Zafer Gölen, "Şark Meselesi Işığında Balkan Milliyetçiliği ve Büyük Güçlerin Politikaları", *Türk Yurdu Dergisi*, No. 284, April 2011, p. 95.

[24] Barbara Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements, 1806-1914*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, p. 267-268; Noel Buxton and C. Leonard Leese, *Balkan Problems and European Peace*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1919, p. 19; Gölen, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

[25] Halil İnalcık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Toplum ve Ekonomi*, Eren Yayınları, İstanbul 1996, p. 358.

[26] Halil İnalcık, *Tanzimat ve Bulgar Meselesi*, Eren Yayıncılık, İstanbul 1992, p. 44; Fahir Armaoğlu, *19. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi (1789-1914)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1997, p. 221.

[27] John R. Lampe and Marvin R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550-1950*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1982, p. 148.

[28] Castellan, *op.cit.*, p. 301; Kemal Karpat, "Balkanlar", *Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 5, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, İstanbul 1992, p. 30.

powers, and armed struggle leading to independence.[29] The first major uprising occurred in early 19th-century Serbia, which gained autonomy under the 1829 Treaty of Edirne, inspiring others, especially Montenegrins.[30] Ottoman concerns over Bosnia and Herzegovina grew due to Montenegrin provocations. After the 1699 Treaty of Karlowitz, Bosnia became a key frontier with Austria, while the 1774 Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji granted Russia the right to protect Orthodox Christians, fueling Bosnian resistance to Ottoman reforms, especially amid Serbian and Montenegrin influence.[31] In protest of the Tanzimat reforms, which introduced a new military structure and higher taxes, Bosnians rose up in armed rebellion in 1831 and 1832. The belief that the new system would abolish professional Janissaries, kapudans, and yerlikulu forces while restructuring landholdings (ocaklık, çiftlik, and malikane) united diverse groups in a struggle to protect their rights. Their discontent extended beyond Bosnia's borders: during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-29 they refused to send troops, and their support remained minimal in the Crimean War, especially after the Tanzimat reforms stripped them of their privileges over the Christian population.[32] Despite Bosnia's Muslim majority, the Ottomans found the region unreliable in critical moments of opposition.[33] At the beginning of the 19th century, the Montenegrins had limited access to the sea, as coastal areas were largely controlled by external powers. To expand their control over the coast, they sought to annex Herzegovina and frequently incited uprisings. They leveraged the loyalty of border districts and support from Western states, creating a dilemma for Ottoman regional policies.[34] Given the state's limited military

[29] Fatma Rodoplu Yıldırım, "Bulgar Milli Uyanışı ve Bulgar Milliyetçiliğinin Özellikleri", *Milliyetçilik Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. 2, No. 1, April 2020, p. 87.

[30] Dušan T. Bataković, "A Balkan-Style French Revolution? The 1804 Serbian Uprising in European Perspective", *Balcanica*, Vol. XXXVI, 2005, p. 115; Ali Ata Yiğit, "Osmanlı-Sırp Sınır Çatışmaları ve Uluslararası İlişkilere Yansımaları (1878-1912)", *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları*, Vol. 124, No. 244, p. 69.

[31] Zafer Gölen, "Osmanlı Yurdu Olan Bosna Hersek'te XIX. Yüzyıldaki Siyasi Olayları", *Belleten*, Vol. 74, No. 270, 2010, p. 423-427.

[32] Jelavich, *Balkan…*, p. 380; Ahmet Cevat Eren, *Mahmud II. Zamanında Bosna Hersek*, Nurgök Matbaası, İstanbul 1965, p. 58-152; Fatma Sel Turhan, *The Ottoman Empire and the Bosnian Uprising, Janissaries, Modernisation and Rebellion in the Nineteenth Century*, I. B. Tauris, London-New York 2014, p. 226.

[33] Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Vol. VII, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 2003, p. 181; İnalcık, *Tanzimat ve Bulgar…*, p. 12-13.

[34] Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804-1920*, University of Washington Press, Seattle and London 2000, p. 143. M. Hüdai Şentürk, "Tuna Vilâyeti'nin Teşkîline, Karadağ ve Hersek Vukuâtına (1861) Dâir Cevdet Paşa Tarafından Kaleme Alınan Lâyiha", *Belleten*, Vol. 59, No. 226, 1995, p. 722-727.

and financial resources and the complex international dynamic, achieving lasting stability and trust required cooperation with the local population. Only with such local support could administrative, fiscal and military reforms be implemented and stability maintained.[35]

## 2. Military Colony Practices in Different States

As part of its efforts to reorganize Bosnia's border administration, the Sublime Porte considered establishing military colonies in the mid-19th century. This approach emerged following Cevdet Efendi's[36] mission to the region in 1863 to assess local conditions.[37] However, Western states had already implemented similar approaches at various times. The first example of this was introduced by Sweden in 1682. The essence of this system was combining the military recruitment system, known as indelningsverket, with the medieval practice of collecting taxes in kind, ensuring a steady supply of soldiers during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Under this system, each region was organized into military districts responsible for recruiting soldiers in wartime, while in peacetime, these soldiers worked on land allocated to them.[38] Unlike earlier conscription methods, each district was now responsible for a fixed quota of soldiers. Crown-owned farms housed, fed, and equipped these farmer-soldiers, who laboured on the farms during peacetime in exchange for their upkeep. The system required regular peacetime training for these soldiers to ensure military readiness. With recruitment and maintenance responsibilities placed on the provinces, a balance of authority emerged between the central government and the provinces. The peasants regarded the system as fairer since it distributed the duty of soldier provision equally across regions and even individual villages.[39]

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[35] Maurus Reinkowski, "Double Struggle, No Income: Ottoman Borderlands in Northern Albania", *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 12, 2003, p. 252-53.

[36] Ahmed Cevdet was not yet Pasha at the time of his assignment to Bosnia, therefore he was referred to as Efendi.

[37] Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Tezakir, 21-39*, (pub. by) Cavid Baysun, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 1986, p. 17.

[38] Thomas Kaiserfeld, "From Mapping to Mixing: Political Recognition of Expertise from the Allotment System to the Public Promotion of Manufactories", p.4, https://www.kth.se/polopoly_fs/1.108212.1550158196!/Menu/general/column-content/attachment/Kaiserfeld.pdf, (21.08.2024).

[39] Lars-Eric Höglund, *The Uniforms of the Swedish Army in the Great Northern War, Acedia Press*, 1996, p. 10; Paul Douglas Lockhart, *Sweden in the Seventeenth Century*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2004, p. 134; Michael Roberts, *The Swedish Imperial Experience, 1560-1718*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984, p. 141.

The system aimed to maintain a standing army at a sustainable cost, providing both protection and political stability, and concentrating resources effectively. This structure of taxation, troop allocation, and supporting administrative controls formed a foundation for the Swedish nation-state from the 17th century onward.[40]

This system, introduced by Sweden, was adopted by Prussia as the cantonal system. Moreover, the agriculture-based economy and the social bonds of the manorial system drew the peasantry's attention to the reorganization of military service. This system sought to strike a balance between the needs of the standing army and those of the economy.[41] Under the canton system, the country was divided into conscription districts, each of which was assigned to a particular regiment. According to the regulations of 1733, each regiment was to recruit its soldiers from its assigned canton. While the non-commissioned ranks of the army were largely comprised of unfree peasants, the non-commissioned officer ranks were often comprised of free peasants, and the officer ranks were almost exclusively comprised of landed gentry. Thus, those who exercised authority over the peasants on the land could also command them in the army.[42] Soldiers trained in these cantons for two to three months a year and returned home for the rest of the year to work according to the seasonal demands of agricultural life in Prussia. The main innovation of the canton system was the shift from a personal power relationship between lord and serf to a structural framework controlled by the state. It also enabled Prussia, with its limited population and material resources, to organise an army of trained professionals without disrupting local economic activity. The system was also a crucial first step in the militarization of Prussian-German society.[43]

The Austrian colonial militia, known as the Grenzer, was established in the 16th century to protect against Ottoman raids along the Danube. The Austrian provinces bordering the Ottoman Empire were organized into

[40] Kaiserfeld, *op.cit*., p. 4-5.
[41] Otto Büsch, *Militarsystem und Sozialleben im Alten Preussen 1713-1807*, Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin 1962, p. 17-18.
[42] Robert M. Berdahl, "The Stande and the Origins of Conservatism in Prussia", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1973, p. 301.
[43] Daniel Riches, "Early Modern Military Reform and the Connection Between Sweden and Brandenburg-Prussia", *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 77, No. 3, 2005, p. 355; Thomas Hippler, *Citizens, Soldiers and National Armies: Military service in France and Germany, 1789-1830*, Routledge, New York 2008, p. 120.

regiments, battalions, and companies, operating similarly to a large military cantonment. Over time, these regions were governed as a military garrison with special rights and privileges. The area also served as a refuge for people fleeing Ottoman raids, particularly after the Treaty of Passarowitz (1718), which led to a mass exodus from Serbia and Bosnia. These refugees were resettled in the border areas along the Danube and Sava rivers. Eventually, the Austrian government turned these border settlements into a military colony, inspired by the frontier colonies established by ancient Greek and Roman rulers. The settlers, who formed a military caste, were given land in the form of fiefs. In return for this land, their primary duty was to protect the border, serving as both a military and sanitary cordon.[44] According to Paget's work on Hungary and Transylvania, these Austrian military colonies along the Ottoman border were more focused on preventing smuggling than defending against enemy incursions or outbreaks of disease; as Ottoman aggression had significantly decreased.[45]

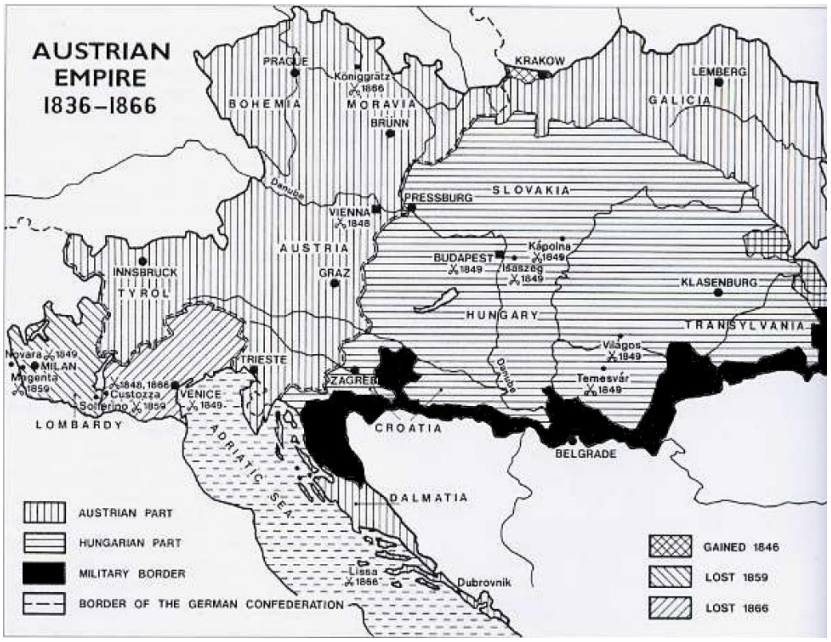
The system can be described as a patriarchal despotism. Each village functions as a self-contained unit with its own territory and a political and military leader. A commissariat official oversees the economic administration, while a judge-lawyer manages judicial affairs. The authority of these officials is unchallenged by the general public, and they hold unlimited control over all aspects of social, family, and individual life. In this colonial military system, the individual has no place outside of their role within the family. A person exists as a member of a family, which resides in a house and its subordinate parts, is allocated a piece of land, provides a certain number of soldiers when necessary, and is ruled by a family head with absolute authority.[46]

In these colonies, families share their livestock and tools. No family member can privately own them.[47] Every man between the ages of 20 and 50 must serve in the army. Younger men undergo regular training in battalions, while older men are called to active duty in emergencies.[48] As a result, it is

[44] Foreign Office (FO), *Commons of Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence Respecting The Affairs of Hungary 1847-49*, 1850, Harrison and Sons, London 1850, p. 48; *The Times* (1867, December 26), No. 26004, p. 8.
[45] *The Weekly National Intelligencer* (1852, May 22), p. 3.
[46] *The Times* (1867, December 26), No. 26004, p. 8.
[47] *The Weekly National Intelligencer* (1852, May 22), p. 3.
[48] Darko Pavlovic, *The Austrian Army 1836-1866 Infantry*, Osprey Publishing, United Kingdom 1999, p. 24.

possible that at any given time, 50.000 men are ready to join the army. On the surface, these 50.000 men appear to cost the state nothing in peacetime. However, a realistic calculation showed that the direct and indirect costs were more than double the cost of maintaining the same number of regular troops.[49] By the mid-nineteenth century, the Austrian military frontier encompassed 1.1 million people in the territories along the eastern Austrian provinces bordering the Ottoman Empire.[50] Map 1 shows the Austrian military frontier zone along the Ottoman frontier. The frontier troops were stationed in Karlstadt, Warasdin, Slavonia, Banat, Banal Croatia (now Central and Southern Croatia), and Transylvania.

**Map 1: Military Frontiers of the Austrian Empire**




**Source**: Darko Pavlovic, *The Austrian Army 1836-1866 Infantry*, Osprey Publishing, United Kingdom 1999, p. 4.

Although the system changed over time, its core principle - administering the region as a large, self-sustaining garrison with special rights

[49] *The Times* (1867, December 26), No. 26004, p. 8.
[50] Foreign Office (FO), *op.cit.*, p. 48.

and privileges- remained in place throughout its existence.[51] By the mid-19th century, when the Ottoman Empire no longer posed a significant threat to Austria, the military colonies became less necessary. Despite this, the central government was reluctant to give up such a valuable resource, which could quickly provide troops for any conflict.[52] However, after the events of 1866, the system could no longer be sustained, and the military structure in the border provinces was reorganized to match that of other provinces.[53]

In early 19th-century Russia, the military colony system was introduced under Alexander I (1777–1825) to alleviate the army's food costs amid financial challenges following the Napoleonic Wars. The goal was to increase the army's self-sufficiency, form a reserve force of soldiers from colonized regions, and promote agricultural development by consolidating scattered villages in the steppes into more sustainable settlements.[54] Although a Prussian-style Landwehr militia system was initially considered, Russia's unique social and economic conditions made a military colony system more practical. Since most of Russia's population was serfs under the control of the nobility and private land ownership was almost nonexistent, this system better suited Russia's needs. Additionally, despite its vast territory, Russia had a lower population density than France, England, and other leading European regions. The empire's outlying areas were culturally diverse, with Cossack, Kalmyk, Bashkir, and other irregular cavalry groups dispersed across the country. Because peasants and serfs were considered the property of the nobility, a conscription law similar to the laws in Austria, Prussia, or France was impractical.[55]

The purpose of organizing military colonies in Russia was to integrate military units with local inhabitants on royal lands, creating a new, self-sufficient peasant-soldier class. In these colonies, inhabitants devoted themselves to agricultural production to meet their needs in peacetime.[56] Each

[51] *The Star* (1869, September 2), No. 30, p. 4.
[52] Pavlovic, *op.cit.*, p. 24.
[53] *The Times* (1869, August 25), No. 26525, p. 7.
[54] Alexander Bitis and Janet Hartley, "The Russian Military Colonies in 1826", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 78, No. 2, 2000, p. 321; Richard Pipes, *Russia Observed, Collected Essays on Russian and Soviet History*, Westview Press, San Francisco, & London 1989, p. 83; Robert Lyall, *Essai Historique Sur Le Systéme De Colonisation Militarie De La Russia*, Chez Les Libraires Du Palais-Royal, Paris 1825, p. 13-29.
[55] *Citizen Soldier* (1841, April 23), Vol. 1, No. 38, p. 4.
[56] Robert Lyall, *Travels in Russia, The Krimea, The Caucaus, and Georgia*, the Strand and W. Blackwood, London 1825, p. 152.

regiment was organized according to specific guidelines to prepare soldiers for this new agricultural role and lifestyle. Married soldiers with agricultural experience who had served six years or more were reassigned to form sedentary battalions, the core of this military-peasantry class. These soldiers were given land, tools, and livestock, and they were exempt from combat duty, focusing solely on agricultural work. Other soldiers and local peasants formed active battalions, living with their families in the homes of the sedentary soldiers and assisting in agricultural tasks in exchange for food and other necessities. During wartime, active battalions were to be mobilized as combat units, while sedentary soldiers would care for the active soldiers' families and property. Both groups engaged in military drills 2-3 days per week, with an exception during harvest time.[57] All agricultural activities were conducted collectively, and individual initiative was restricted. Military authorities regulated the lives of colonists in meticulous detail, leading to some social resistance. By the late 1840s, Bulgarians from Bessarabia who had been resettled in Russian provinces, returned to Ottoman lands upon learning they would be placed in military colonies, preferring Ottoman rule to the regimented life of these colonies.[58]

Once the necessary preparations for organizing the colonies were completed, the population in each colony was divided into five categories, each with specific roles. Each colony had a 'master colonist' over 50, from the resident battalion, who managed the farm and was assigned about 40 acres of land. The master colonist was supported by a helper, usually one of his sons, relatives, or friends, in cultivating the land. Each farm also included a peasant-soldier from the active battalion, who worked under the guidance of the master colonist and shared meals with his household. Besides his military duties, the peasant-soldier helped with farming tasks. A reserve unit, similar to the peasant-soldier, performed agricultural duties and could replace the peasant-soldier if needed. Soldiers' and peasants' children were grouped as 'canonists' in three age ranges: under 7 years, 7-12 years, and 12-18 years.[59] Colonists who reached the age of seven were required to attend school. Each established colony typically had its own school. To train teachers for the schools opened in these military settlements, an institute for military teachers was established.[60] The older two groups were sent to specialized military

[57] Pipes, *op.cit.*, p. 85-87.
[58] *The Star of Freedom* (1848, January 15), No. 534, p. 3.
[59] *The Evening Post* (1824, May 7), No. 6815, p. 2.
[60] Elmira R. Polatkhanova, "Count Alexei Arakcheev and the Rise of Primary School System in the Russian Military Colonies (1815-1825)", *ЛОКУС: люди, общество, культуры,*

schools, where they received training in swordsmanship, reading, writing, arithmetic, and religious studies. At age 18, cantonists joined the active battalions as reservists, forming the second category, or they entered the ranks of the resident battalions through family connections or inheritance, forming the third category. Active battalions comprised the fourth category, while veterans and invalids made up the fifth and final category. Veterans and invalids were exempt from all work responsibilities and received housing and clothing from the government.[61]

In the military colonies, all boys were automatically enrolled as soldiers at birth and served a 20-year term, with the last 5 years spent in reserve. This system allowed Russia to maintain a large army with minimal direct funding from the central treasury as the colonies were largely self-sustaining. In 1828, 120,000 of Russia's 764,000 soldiers were colonial soldiers.[62] Military colonies were established in four main provinces; each was occupied by ten or more regiments: Novgorod, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Ekaterinoslav.[63] The southern colonies were organized to defend against the Ottoman Empire and Austria, while the northern colonies were positioned to counter Sweden and other Baltic states.[64] According to a report by Commander Arakcheyev (1769-1834), the architect of Russia's military colony system, by 1826, about 16 per cent of the colonies were failing to achieve the expected self-sufficiency. In addition to supporting the battalions on duty, the government had to provide rations and resources for the colonized battalions. Each colonized regiment cost the state 5 million roubles annually, and with 200 regiments, the yearly expense amounted to 1 billion roubles. The high mortality rate among the children of soldiers in the colonies led to a population shortfall, necessitating the transfer of people from other villages and estates to sustain the population of colonies.[65] To fund this costly project, Alexander I allocated a significant portion of tax revenue. However, in the long term, the military colonies proved economically unsustainable.[66] Rather than an efficient means of feeding and equipping a reserve army, the

*смыслы*, 13(1), 2022, p. 27, 31. http://j-locus.ru/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2022-1-23.pdf, (21.02.2025).

[61] Lyall, *Colonisation Militarie*, p. 13-29.

[62] *The Times* (1823, December 26), No. 12068, p. 2.

[63] Richard E. Pipes, "The Russian Military Colonies, 1810-1831", *The Journal of Modern History*, 22 (3), 1950, p. 208.

[64] *The North Australian* (1856, June 31), No. 31, p. 4.

[65] *The Morning Post* (1826, January 24), No. 17191, p. 2.

[66] Pipes, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

colonies became a hotbed for corruption, with widespread looting and destruction that eventually compelled the tsar to consider dismantling the system.[67] Serious revolts also broke out across many regions where military colonies were established. Following the forced deportation of rebels, including many sent to Siberian mines, the remaining population reluctantly submitted to the system.[68] After the Crimean War, the abolition of serfdom and the reduction of the standing army from 1.150.000 to a more manageable 850.000 led to the dismantling of the military colony system, which had long imposed despotic pressures on agricultural producers.[69]

### 3. Why and How the Ottomans Used the Military Colony (Koloni-Militer) System for Border Security

The concept of the colonial-military method for the Ottoman Empire was first articulated by Helmut von Moltke (1800-1891), who served as a captain in the country between 1835 and 1839. According to Moltke, had the Ottomans militarily colonized parts of the Aydos and Karinabad plains before the Ottoman-Russian War of 1828-29, the Balkans would have posed a much more formidable challenge.[70] In practice, Ottoman military authorities began to consider implementing the colonial militarization method in the late 1840s, driven by fears that revolutionary movements in Europe could spread to Ottoman territories. It was believed that models similar to those employed by Sweden on the Iranian border[71] in the east, and by Russia and Austria on the

[67] *The Daily News* (1861, September 28), No. 4800, p. 4.
[68] *The Hampshire Advertiser* (1831, September 10), No. 425, p. 2.
[69] Foreign Office (FO), *Abstract of Reports of the Trade, &c., of Various Contries and Places, For the Years 1859, 1860*, Printed by Harrison and Sons, London 1862, p. 147.
[70] Freiherrn von Moltke, *Der Russisch-Türkische Feldzug in der Europäischen Türkei 1828-1829*, Verlag Reimer, Berlin 1845, p. 400.
[71] The implementation of the military colony system, requested by the Field Marshal of the Anatolian Army and the Governor of Kurdistan for the Iranian and Russian borders, was postponed due to the unconquered tribes in the region. It was decided to wait until the border demarcation issue between Iran and the Ottoman Empire was settled. In the meantime, the Bashi-bozuk soldiers would suffice. However, calculations revealed that had the system been implemented, it would have cost the treasury an additional 8,000 to 8,500 piastres annually (BOA, *İ. HR,* 61/2977). In the years following the Crimean War, a large-scale migration of Circassians from the Caucasus to Ottoman lands began. During this period, the organization of military colonies in the region stretching from the Black Sea to Erzurum became a key focus. In response to Russia's efforts to expand its influence by facilitating the evacuation of the Muslim population in Abkhazia and Circassia, a decision was made to resettle Circassians as military colonies in Erzurum, Kars, and Van. The idea was that by increasing agricultural production, the burden on the productive population from the army could be alleviated. (BOA,

western frontier (such as the Bosnian province), could be adapted to enhance regional security.[72]

Bosnia was the first province selected for the implementation of this new procedure due to its status as a border province; the conflicts with Montenegro and Serbia that had persisted since the early 19th century; concerns over the potential spread of the 1848 Revolutions; and the security vacuum created by the abolition of the kapudanlık system, which was as significant as the other factors in necessitating the military colony system. This group, which had held the highest military and civilian offices and expanded its power in the region since the early 19th century, acted independently of the central state. After the abolition of the Janissary corps and the transfer of administrative duties from the captains to the mütesellims,[73] this transition became a source of unrest. A key motive behind the 1831 rebellion, known as Hüseyin Kapudan's rebellion, and the subsequent Bosnian uprisings was the Bosnian elites' desire to preserve their privileges.[74] The issue of abolishing the *kapudanlık* system, first raised in 1837 during the governorship of Mehmed Vecihi Pasha, heightened unrest in Bosnia. As a result, Mehmed Vecihi Pasha was dismissed and replaced by Mehmed Hüsrev Pasha, with a promise that the Tanzimat reforms would not be implemented in Bosnia for the time being. However, in 1849, the then-governor, Mehmed Tahir Pasha, issued an order to enforce the Tanzimat in Bosnia.[75] The 1831 uprising had long-term consequences, leading to the abolition of both the local *beys*' status and the old military border organization. However, a regular army was not introduced, apart from the formation of four battalions of the Ottoman National Guard (*Redif*), leaving Bosnia highly vulnerable to external threats.[76] Letters to the Sublime Porte from Bosnia's Governor, Mehmed Tahir Bey, and the Müşir of the Rumeli Army highlighted the gravity of the situation, noting that the number of soldiers stationed in nearby cities like Niš, Thessaloniki, Yenişehir, and Ioannina would be insufficient in case of disturbance. Meanwhile, Christian

*A. MKT. UM*, 792/59; Foreing Office (FO), *Commons Parliamentary Papers, Settlement of Circassian Emigrant in Turkey*, Harrison and Sons, London 1864).

[72] BOA, *A. MKT. MVL*, 22/9.

[73] A governor of a single town or district. See J. W. Redhouse, *Redhouse's Turkish Dictionary*, Wyman and Sons, London 1880, p. 763.

[74] Turhan, *op.cit*, p. 63-76.

[75] Eren, *op.cit*, p. 157; BOA, *İ. DH*. 22/1045.

[76] Fikret Karčić, *The Bosniaks and the Challanges of Modernity*, El-Kalem, Sarajevo 1999, p. 47.

populations in the area were reportedly preparing and arming themselves. To address these concerns, the Governor and the Müşir requested that regular soldiers be dispatched to Bosnia and that a regional militia be formed from the local population. This would help organize more soldiers with less effort, particularly in relatively sparsely populated areas.[77]

The governor of Bosnia, Mehmed Tahir Pasha (1785-1851), wrote to the Military Council (*Dâr-ı Şûra-yı Askeri)* proposing that inhabitants of the Bihać, Ostrožac, Novosel, and Krupa districts -regions on the Austrian border and both sides of the Una River- be exempted from *Shari'a* taxes for the first year. He suggested that in the following year, one-third of their tithe could be allocated to fund militia units composed of able-bodied locals.[78] In response, the Military Council stated that a small tax could be levied in Bosnia. They noted that regional notables were not accustomed to paying tithes on their farm products, and even if they agreed to contribute, the burden might fall on the general population. The council recognized that establishing frontier military units in these areas could provide a powerful new force for the state, similar to the *Redif* (reserve army). However, they emphasized that these troops should be organized based on the needs and population of each region. Therefore, the Governor of Bosnia was instructed to visit the area, assess how the troops could be organized, and gather information on the population and locations where they would be stationed.[79] The Military Council formulated detailed instructions regarding the salaries, rations, and supplies allocated to the soldiers assigned to these units and submitted them to the Imperial Assembly.[80]

The Bosnian governor's security concerns about the border were well-founded. The Herzegovinian rebellion of 1849-1851, which intensified due to delays in the central administration's intervention, was eventually suppressed in July 1851 following the appointment of Ömer Pasha[81] (1806-1876), commander of the Rumelian army.[82] The Crimean War (1853-1856),

[77] BOA, *İ. MSM*, 67/1943.; BOA, *İ. MSM*, 82/2326.
[78] BOA, *İ. DH*, 191/10735.
[79] BOA, *İ. MVL*, 145/4063.; BOA, *İ. DH*, 191/10735.
[80] BOA, *A. MKT. MVL*, 17/1.; BOA, *A. AMD, 13/30.*
[81] His real name was Mihajlo Latas and he defected to the Ottoman Empire in 1827 and took the name of Ömer Lütfi. See Abdullah Saydam, "Ömer Lütfi Paşa", *Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi,* Vol. 34. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, İstanbul 2007, p. 74.
[82] Zafer Gölen, "1849-1851 Bosna Hersek İsyanı", *Belleten*, Vol. 66, No. 247, 2002, p. 917-920.

caused the plans for establishing a military colony to be postponed. It is seen that the Ottomans did not prefer the option of establishing a military colony on the Danube River using the Polish legion that took refuge in the Ottoman Empire and settled in Kutshuk Tchekmedji during the war.[83] Shortly after the war, unrest between Muslims and non-Muslims in Bosnia prompted the Ottoman government to publish the Bosnian Farm Regulation (*Bosna Çiftlik Nizamnamesi*) as a part of efforts to restore order in the province. However, difficulties in implementing this regulation prevented Ahmet Cevdet Efendi (1823-1895) and his committee from establishing peace and security in the region amid the uprisings that began in 1862. To calm the rebellions, gather demographic information about the region, and survey the public on military restructuring, Ahmet Cevdet Efendi was sent to Bosnia.[84]

In a report by Ahmet Cevdet Efendi, it was noted that Bosnia was bordered by the Austria State, as well as the Serbian and Montenegrin emirates, and was connected to the Rumelian region only by the narrow corridor of the Yenipazar (Novi Pazar) Sanjak. Due to this geographic position, proposed by Serdar Ömer Pasha, forming a *mustahfiz* (local defence) unit from the local population in colonial military style (koloni militer usūlünde) was recommended to ensure regional security.[85] Although the chaos in Rebellious Districts (Nevâhî-i Âsîye)[86] had been quelled with the Montenegro Operation in 1861, difficulties in transferring reserve battalions from Rumelia and Anatolia to Bosnia highlighted the need to recruit soldiers locally as a more efficient and effective force.[87] Ahmet Cevdet Efendi suggested that regular military units could be recruited from the non-border areas of Bosnia. He outlined three potential methods for recruiting soldiers from the region:

> 1. Standard Lottery Method: As in other Ottoman regions, men aged 20-25 would be conscripted by lottery for five years of active duty and seven years of reserve duty.

[83] *The Times* (1856, July 31), No. 22434, p. 9.
[84] Ahmet Zeki İzgöer, "Ahmet Cevdet Paşa ve Bosna Islahatı", *Divan: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi,* No. 6, 1999, p. 214.
[85] Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *op.cit*., p. 30.
[86] A population of Christians living in the mountains along the border with Montenegro. See Şentürk, *op.cit.*, p. 734.
[87] BOA, *A. MKT. MHM*, 288/61.

2. Age-Based Enrollment: Men aged 20-28 could be conscripted by lottery for two years, or a set number could be enrolled starting from the older age groups.

3. Colonial Military System: All Muslim men aged 20-45 who were fit for service would be counted as soldiers and provided with periodic training and weapons.

Although Bosnia-Herzegovina's population records were somewhat unreliable, it was estimated that there were 1.144.000 people in the region, with 472.000 being Muslims. Of this number, half were considered able to be mobilized for military service.[88] However, this force was deemed insufficient for the region's defence, and continuous rebellions against conscription to İstanbul (Dersaadet), combined with the strong-willed nature of the local population, led to a postponement of the lottery method by one or two years, shifting focus to the second and third recruitment methods.[89] Regardless of the recruitment method, Ahmet Cevdet Efendi emphasized the importance of gaining local support for the idea initially. In January 1864, the Grand Vizier wrote to Ömer Pasha, commander of the Rumelian Army, endorsing the colonial military method for the Herzegovina border. However, he noted that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina might view this approach with scepticism. Therefore, he proposed establishing a protection committee and gathering public opinion on the plan. During the investigation, officials explained to the locals that the Ottoman government aimed to recruit mustahfız soldiers from the local population to foster trust in the province and ensure its security.[90]

The town of Nikšić in the Bosnia Province on the Balkan border was initially selected for implementing the colonial military method. Ömer Pasha was informed that a brigade would be sent to the region, and the local population would be made to engage in agriculture.[91] The next planned stage, included expanding this method to regions such as Korjenić, Korita, Kolašin, Bileća, and Gacko. A significant challenge in broadening the application is that some regional borders have not yet been fully defined. However, regions incorporated into the colonial military department would be exempt from

[88] Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *op.cit.*, p. 31-32.
[89] BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 17/120.
[90] BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 12/101.
[91] BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 17/52.

regular military recruitment; though voluntary enlistment would be encouraged and welcomed because the people of these areas had a similar lifestyle in the past, it was anticipated that forming border forces from local recruits under the colonial military system would align with local customs and traditions.[92] Thus, both order and stability could be established in these regions, and they could gradually be brought under the regular army's recruitment scope. Applying this system in a semicircle from Trebinje to Gusinje is expected to secure the local population, reduce expenses for the treasury, and allow for the redirection of weapons formerly used in rebellions against the Ottomans towards Montenegro. In summary, the development and modernization of Bosnia and Herzegovina would be promoted through this approach.[93]

In the minutes prepared by the assemblies of Novi Pazar and its subordinate districts in July 1864, and sent to the Grand Vizier by Cevdet Efendi, it was recommended that the military method used in Bosnia also be applied in the districts of Pljevlja (Taşlıca) and Gusinje. These had been separated from Herzegovina and Shkodër and attached to Novi Pazar. It was noted that Gusinje and Upper Kolašin (Kolaşin-i Bala), bordering the Albanian plateaus and the Vasovik district, were in a similar situation to Nikšić. Therefore, these regions should not be excluded from or incorporated into the military colony system and should remain unchanged.[94] The necessity for this inclusion stemmed from the unrest in the area. Despite the conclusion of the Montenegro operation in 1862, some residents of the Pljevaljski and Vasović districts, identifying as Montenegrins, refused to recognize Ottoman sovereignty and resisted paying both land rents and public taxes. While efforts to define the border between the Ottoman Empire and Montenegro were ongoing, Montenegrins attacked Kolašin, forcing the local population to abandon their lands.[95]

A letter sent by Ferik[96] Ömer Fevzi, the Commander of Herzegovina, to Ahmet Cevdet Efendi, the inspector of the Bosnia region, suggested that the military colonies should not be composed solely of Muslims from the region. Rather, including Christians who had fought alongside Muslims against Montenegro would not only facilitate this arrangement but also help

[92] BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 12/101.; BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 28/56.; BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 31/11.
[93] BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 13/12.
[94] BOA, *A. MKT. MHM*, 311/75.
[95] BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 25/73.
[96] Ferik was the commander of division in Ottoman Army.

to distinguish these Christians from Montenegrins and foster a sense of trust.[97] However, the Montenegrin actions caused Muslims from Novi Pazar and Nikšić to abandon their homeland and retreat to Bosnia, disrupting the balance between Muslims and non-Muslims in the region. The concern arose that Ottoman soldiers might face challenges in maintaining security in a population composed entirely of Christians, making it necessary to transfer and resettle Muslims from other regions. In line with this requirement, the letter from the Commander of Herzegovina to Ahmed Cevdet Efendi proposed the settlement of Circassian refugees[98] in suitable areas, either between Novi Pazar and the Serbian border or from Mostar, Nevesinje, Gacko, and Gorge of Duga (Klanac Duga) to Nikšić. Dividing Nevahi-i Asiye into two parts and constructing stone houses for the settlers, modeled after those in Nikšić, would serve as a type of fortification and be effective in maintaining peace in the region.[99] Although the decision had been made to resettle 1.500 households of Circassian refugees in Vasojevići, Ferik Ömer Pasha noted in his report that officials responsible for the resettlement process acted according to their interests. Unlike in Anatolia, where Circassians were dispersed, in the Balkans, they were strategically settled in key areas along the Ottoman-Serbian border and along the Danube, extending to Dobrudja to form a line of defence against Russian and Serbian forces.[100]

The Trebišnjica River was ultimately designated as the boundary between regions where the colonial militia system was implemented and those where soldiers were conscripted by lottery. Districts on the Montenegrin side of Trebinje, as well as Bileća, Gacko, Nikšić, Kolašin, and Gusinje, were exempt from this lottery system. In these areas, all able-bodied men were considered part of the military colony and assigned to rotational training and deployment.[101] The government chose to work collaboratively with local leaders to define the organization and responsibilities of the colonial militia and regular troops from other parts of Bosnia, rather than enforcing unilateral decisions. After discussions in the local assembly, it was agreed that auxiliary forces from the Herzegovina and Novi Pazar regions bordering Montenegro

[97] BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 31/9.
[98] For more information on the migration movements from Crimea and the Caucasus to the Ottoman lands during the period. See Abdullah Saydam, *Kırım ve Kafkas Göçleri (1856-1876)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1997.
[99] BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 19/13.
[100] Vahit Cemil Urhan, "Kosova'ya Yapılan Çerkes Göçü ve İskanı (1864-1856), *Belleten*, Vol. 85, No. 304, December 2021, p. 999.
[101] Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *op.cit*., p. 75, 104.; BOA, *TŞR. BNM,* 28/175.

would join the military colony system, while other towns and districts would continue conscripting soldiers by lottery.[102] In most parts of the Ottoman Empire, active military service was five years, followed by seven years in reserve. In Bosnia, however, active service was set at three years, with nine additional years in reserve. Local councils and trusted community members managed recruitment. These troops would not be deployed outside Bosnia, and some of their officers were chosen from among prominent local figures. The uniforms of the troops in active service will be in the traditional style of their homeland. They will be considered redifs, and those in their households will be trained during specific periods.[103] The map below shows the locations where the military colony system would have been implemented, the centres where Circassian refugees would have beeen settled, and the centres of the border battalions after 1870.

**Map 2: Military Colonies, Circassian Settlements and the Location of Border Battalions on the Bosnian Frontier**

[102] The Nizamiye troops to be formed from the local population in Bosnia were initially composed of 6 battalions. The 1st Battalion was formed from Sarajevo, Zvornik, Visoko, Donja Tuzla (Tuzla-i Zir), Bijeljina, *Srebrenica*, Gradačac and Gračanica, the 2nd Battalion was formed from Prusac (Akhisar), Tešanj (Teşene), Travnik, Ostrovica, Banja Luka (Banyaluka) and Bihać, the 3rd Battalion was formed from Bihor, Čajniče (Çayniçe), Nova Varoš (Yenivaroş), Yenipazar (Novi Pazar), Trgovište (Tırgovişte), Pljevlja and Mostar. As of November 1864, soldiers were also recruited from Herzegovina. See Uğur Ünal, "Sultan Abdülaziz Döneminde Bosna Nizamiye Alayları (1861-1876)", *Belleten*, Vol. 81, No. 290, 2017, p. 233.

[103] BOA, *TŞR. BNM,* 17/57.; Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *op.cit*., p. 37-38.




**Source:** Ahmet Cevdet Paşa (1986); BOA, *TŞR. BNM*, 19/13; BOA, *İ. DH,* 616/42899.

The map was produced by marking the places mentioned in the Archival Documents on the 1855 Colton Map. The areas shown with red flags on the map are where the colonial-military method was applied, the places with green flags are the settlement areas of Circassian refugees. The yellow dots indicate the positions of the 1st battalion of the frontier soldiers, the brown dots the 2nd battalion, the blue dots the 3rd battalion, and the orange dots the 4th battalion.

Although archival sources indicate that the Austrian and Russian systems were referenced, there is insufficient information about the specific criteria guiding the operation of the military colony system in the Balkans. However, the criteria established for the district of Kotur (now Qatur in Iran) on the eastern frontier during the same period may provide insights into the Balkan frontier approach. Since the population in this area, like that of

Nevahi-i Asiye, was largely tribal and not accustomed to centralized military structures, a colonial military system was initially considered impractical. Instead, plans were developed to establish 60–70 outposts within a two-hour radius and to settle approximately 7.000 Turks, who were reassigned from regular service to military duty. The system included a structured division of resources: after seed costs were deducted from the harvest, one-third of the remaining yield was allocated to the soldiers, another third to the state, and the final third used to fund the system's operations. Each outpost was planned to include stables for animals, grain warehouses, and other necessary facilities, effectively transforming them into large, self-sustaining farms. However, calculations revealed that supporting 7.000 men would require at least 4.000 pairs of oxen (costing 500 piastres each) for agricultural production, along with 700.000 piastres for seeds, tools, and supplies. The estimated total cost for construction and personnel was 10,5 million piastres (approximately 95.454,5 pounds). Due to these high expenses, the implementation of the military colony system was ultimately postponed.[104]

On February 17, 1867, a telegram sent from the Bosnian Governorate to the Sadaret (Grand Vizierate) provides information on the types of soldiers stationed in Herzegovina and Novi Pazar and their annual expenses. According to this telegram, four types of soldiers were stationed between Sutorina in the Herzegovina Sanjak and the Sanjak of Novi Pazar. The first of these was 666 Pandurs, consisting of Christians from the districts of the Sanjak of Herzegovina and Muslims from Korjenić on the frontier, among others. Their salary and rations for one year amounted to 177.910 piastres. The second is the border battalion organized from Nikšić. The annual salary, rations, and clothing cost of these battalions, consisting of 818 men with their officers, amounted to 542.218 piastres. The third was a military unit of 189 men from Pljevlja, formed by dissolving and converting the Başıbozuks[105] into Zabtiye[106] against the Nevahi-i Asiye. Their one-year salary, rations, and clothing cost 396 thousand piastres. Lastly, there were 1762 troops of *Âsakîr-i Muvazzafa*[107] in Trebinje, Gacko, Gorge of Duga and Kolašin who had not

[104] BOA, *İ. HR*, 61/2977.

[105] The name given to volunteers who joined the army during the war. See Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü I*, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, İstanbul, 1993, p. 164.

[106] The Ottoman Empire's gendarmerie prior to 1923.

[107] The regular army is divided into two groups: those currently serving under arms are known as the *Muvazzaf*, while those who have completed active duty and remain in their home regions as a permanent reserve force are called the Redif. See Erik Jan Zürcher, "The Ottoman

yet been converted into frontier troops. Their salary and rations for one year amounted to 3.159.420 piastres. The total cost of these four types of troops is 4.876.755 piastres (approximately 44.334 pounds). The telegram also mentions that the governors of Bosnia and Shkodër will be consulted about the number of regular soldiers in these regions, as well as their salaries and rations. This concerns organizing and employing people along the Herzegovina-Shkodër border under the military colony system previously established for Nikšić.[108] However, shortly after the system's establishment, a letter was sent to the Command of the Army of Rumelia concerning the implementation of a border military arrangement in areas where soldiers were recruited according to the military colony method starting from Nikšić.[109]

Thus, changes were made to the recruitment of soldiers for the military colony, which the authorities envisioned would be expanded gradually. One reason for these changes was to avoid the disadvantages of failing to implement administrative reforms in the military sector. The Bosnian Province was structured as a province within the framework of the Regulations of the Danube Vilayet of 1864 (Tuna Vilayet Nizamnamesi).[110] However, due to the ongoing instability in the region, the military colony practice continued for some time. The military colony system was abolished in the districts of Nikšić, Gacko, and Bileća; on the opposite side of the Trebišnjica River in the sanjaks of Herzegovina and Novi Pazar, as well as in Gusinje, to ensure these areas would not be deprived of the benefits of the new system. The abolition was also intended to prevent the actions of individuals intending to create mischief in the region to provoke the people by spreading rumours that they would be granted certain privileges. After this, a new order was issued to form a border unit in the region.[111] In a letter to the Sadaret (Grand Vizierate), the Governor of Bosnia, Sherif Osman, explained that due to the proximity of the Bosnian province to the Montenegro border, the districts of Trebinje, Bihać, Nikšić, Gacko, and Kolašin in the Herzegovina and Novi Pazar sanjaks, along with some districts of Foča and

Cosncription System, 1844-1914", *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 43, No. 3, December 1998, p. 440.

[108] BOA, *MVL*, 1046/119.

[109] Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *op.cit.*, p. 75, 104.

[110] The regulation was first implemented in the Danube Province, which was formed by merging the provinces of Niš, Vidin and Silistre, then secondly in Bosnia, thirdly in Edirne, fourthly in Aleppo and then in the provinces of Syria, Tripoli and Erzurum. See Selda Kaya Kılıç, "1864 Vilayet Nizamnamesi'nin Tuna Vilayeti'nde Uygulanması ve Mithat Paşa", *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. 24, No. 37, 2005, p. 103.

[111] BOA, *A. MKT. MHM*, 341/98.; BOA, *İ. DH*, 616/42899.; BOA. *A. MKT. MHM*, 336/75.

Pljevlja, were exempt from conscription by lottery for the formation of border troops. These battalions, called *Asâkir-i Hudûdiye* (Border troops), were modeled after the border troops organized on the Greek border. However, the rules for recruiting soldiers were the same as those in Bosnia. Each *Asakir-i Hududiye* company, consisting of 186 men, contributed to a total of 747 men, was to be recruited entirely from the local population. The district's population would thus be divided into two classes: civilians and soldiers. The companies within the battalion would rotate guard duty at forts and other key locations, each company serving for one month. As a result, each company would be on guard for three months of the year and engaged in other duties for the remaining nine months. Recruits for the *Asakir-i Hududiye* battalions could not be younger than 16 or older than 50 and were paid half the salary of regular soldiers.[112]

The reason for the formation of the Asakir-i Hududiye battalions was the expectation that Montenegro, might attempt a new revolutionary movement. Montenegro was allied with the Serbs and practiced military exercises with the weapons it received from Austria. The alliance treaties signed between Serbia and Montenegro in 1866 and between Greece and Serbia in 1867, with the support of Russia, while the Ottoman Empire was dealing with the Cretan revolt, confirmed these suspicions.[113] Although Russia and Austria sided with Montenegro in this process, the violent and defection-prone temperament of the people of Shkodër and Foča prompted the Ottoman government to increase security measures in the region.[114] In 1870, these border guard units, formed as irregular cordon battalions, were transformed into a regular cordon regiment, consisting of four battalions.[115]

## Conclusion

The military colony method has been used in many countries from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era as a measure that combines the needs of a traditional economy based on agriculture with military requirements such as regular recruitment and defence. In the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire

[112] BOA, *İ. DH*, 553/38505.
[113] Jelavich, *Balkan*, p. 364-365.
[114] BOA, *A. MKT. MHM*, 354/82; *A. MKT. MHM*, 349/67.
[115] BOA, *İ. DH*, 616/42899.

began considering this method in response to the security vulnerabilities along the Balkan frontier. Before the 19th century, the frontier system, reliant on paramilitary groups formed with the intense participation of both Muslims and non-Muslims, became unfeasible due to the shifting economic, political, and social conditions of the time. At the dawn of the 19th century, the challenges faced by the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans necessitated the creation of a new border organization. Moreover, following the abolition of Kapudanlik System, a new role had to be created for the duties previously performed by kapudans. The ongoing rebellions against the state's sovereignty compelled the Ottomans to act swiftly and adopt a method that had frequently been employed by Western countries against them. However, the state did not rush in determining where to apply this method and instead sent a committee to the region to assess the sentiments of its people.

The Ottomans deemed it suitable to first implement this new procedure along the Bosnian border. The primary reason was heightened regional tension, fueled by ongoing harassment from Montenegro and the encirclement of Bosnia by Serbian and Montenegrin forces, following territorial losses since the late 18th century. This situation fostered a rigid conservatism and defensive mindset in Bosnia, which hindered the central government's reform efforts in the region. The implementation of this new method began in Nikšić, Kolašin, Gusinje, Gacko, Trebinje, Bileća, with plans for broader application. In Bosnia, where recruiting soldiers by lot was especially challenging, the military colony system was established alongside the formation of the *Nizamiye* regiments (regular regiments). By adopting this system, the state not only aimed to secure the Bosnian border against Montenegro but also introduced an interim method for involving the region in regular army recruitment. Though initially intended for expansion, the military colony system was short-lived, as Bosnia was soon brought under the administrative framework of the Danube Vilayet regulations. Soldiers recruited through this system were incorporated into border battalions. The establishment of *Asakir-i Hududiye* battalions then created a more structured and organized frontier defense in the region. Despite challenges, the military colony approach proved effective in integrating a region like Bosnia- where recruiting soldiers was difficult- into the regular army system, aligning it with the military needs of the state.

Although the Ottomans adapted the military colony method on the Bosnian frontier to suit regional realities, their awareness that this approach had been previously implemented by Sweden, Russia, and Austria, along with

their efforts to model it after these examples, demonstrates that the Ottomans closely observed Western military institutions and were willing to adopt them when conditions warranted. This highlights the pragmatic character of the Ottoman worldview. Moreover, in parallel with the centralist reforms of the 19th century, the Ottomans maintained their organizational adaptability in terms of adapting Western methods, though not at the production level.

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