The Eastern Question as a Europe question: Viewing the ascent of 'Europe' through the lens of Ottoman decline

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Abstract

During the nineteenth century, the decline of the Ottoman Empire emerged as a central issue in European politics and society. While this so-called 'Eastern Question' has long featured in diplomatic histories, there has been little attention to how 'Europe', as place and idea, may have developed in tandem with the events and dynamics that made up the Eastern Question. This article looks at three major events in the narrative of the Eastern Question to demonstrate how Europeans were – and still are – influenced by their relationship to and role in Ottoman decline, noting how such events produced experiences and values now associated with what, where and why 'Europe' is. Indeed, ongoing debates over the accession to the European Union of former Ottoman territories in south-eastern Europe and the Near East clearly exhibit the persistence of language, ideals and forms that were constructed during the era of the Eastern Question.

Introduction

Scholars of European history and society never fail to note that 'Europe' is an idea more than it is a thing (Balzaretti, 1992; Neubauer, 2006; Woolf, 2003). This has, however, led to a paradox wherein everyone agrees that the category of Europe exists, but it is so contested as to defy attempts to cast it in a coherent shape. Indeed, Europe almost never means the same thing to different people, while even within the confines of a single mind it feels dishonest to treat it as a creature rather than an abstraction. Scholarship is

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therefore justly replete with commentary on the confusing identity of Europe (Baranovsky, 2000; Bonnén, 2003: 32−44; Pocock, 1997; Rose, 1997; Walker, 2001). In the era of the European Union, defining Europe has, moreover, developed an urgent, frustrating texture. William Hitchcock (2004: 435) strikes the right tone when he says that questions on the precise essence of the EU are 'alarming' because of the 'elusive' and unsatisfying answers we all come up with. Perhaps, then, more satisfactory answers may emerge from historical issues that have been relatively absent from the discussion – issues whose consideration helps us to reassess what constitutes the European ideal, the variations of Europeanness, and the historical qualifications for membership in the European place.

This article concerns one understudied area of history upon which both the physical and notional shape of Europe is not only based but in many ways depends. I propose that one cannot understand what Europe means today without considering how certain phases in the decline and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire were processed by those who inhabited a mindset where the consideration of this issue figured highly. In the last 30 years of scholarship it has been common to think about such topics in terms of how the concept of 'the East' relates to the shape of the West's understanding of itself (Buruma and Margalit, 2005; Carrier, 1995; Said, 1978, 1993; Todorova, 1997; Wolff, 1994), and this is indeed an important idea. What has been overlooked is that in the many places in modern history where the discourses about Europe and non-Europe or East and West appear, the discursive context was not 'East v. West', or who is 'European' or 'non-European', but rather concerned the problems resulting from Ottoman decline, or what was called from the 1820s onwards the 'Eastern Question'. An examination of the history of the Eastern Question, especially how Ottoman decline was regarded by major European states and their inhabitants, might illuminate an important aspect of the question about where, when and why 'Europe' came to operate in the way it does in the global landscape and the modern mind.

Two frustrating issues for those of us who study the Eastern Question have been, first, that most studies on the Eastern Question are 50 or more years old, and, second, that the problem of the definition of the Eastern Question is usually framed either too broadly or narrowly. With this in mind, I have devised a definition that is at once comprehensive and open-ended: *The 'Eastern Question' refers to the events and the complex set of dynamics related to Europe's experience of and stake in the decline in political, military and economic power and regional significance of the Ottoman Empire from the latter half of the eighteenth century to the formation of modern Turkey in 1923.*

Two caveats should be noted here. First, scholars have recently begun to theorize that it is not totally clear that the Ottoman Empire was, in fact, in decline during this period – a theme Alan Mikhail (2011: 26) has provocatively termed 'a historiographical red herring' (also, see Blumi, 2012: 15−47; Findley, 2008; Hupchick, 2004: 164; Kafadar, 1997−8; Quataert, 2003; Yapp, 1987: 94−6). Still, most Europeans during the late Ottoman era saw decline as the way things were going, while scholars of the post-Ottoman period long based their understanding of the pre-1923 era on the fact that the Ottoman Empire eventually fell (Hanioğlu, 2008: 1−2; Macfie, 1996: 2−4). Second, as observers and subsequent scholarship depicted the Eastern Question as a succession of wars and diplomatic encounters between the Great Powers of Europe (Austria-Hungary, Prussia/Germany, Russia, France and Britain), the Eastern Question has almost

invariably been seen as a problem mostly confined to official policymaking of the 'great men' of Europe (see Anderson, 1966; Marriott, 1917; Temperley, 1936).

In reality, though, limiting the Eastern Question to the realm of traditional diplomatic history is outdated and, moreover, false. The constituent issues that made up the Eastern Question involved certain broader aspects of each state's development in the modern period and in Europe's development as a whole. With this in mind, I look at three important phases in the history of the Eastern Question (and the Ottomans' alleged decline), connecting each of them to a theme related to the ascent of 'Europe'. First, I examine the Greek War of Independence and the 'Romantic' aspect of the European ideal. Second, I look at the Crimean War and the advent of Europe as an elastic 'political union' capable of both expansion and retraction. Finally, I suggest a view on the 'rational' physical and imaginative boundaries of Europe as defined by the 1878 Congress of Berlin. I close with a brief analysis of how new studies of the Eastern Question may change our vision of what Europe 'is' and what we might do with this insight in the EU era. Of course, other events in the timeline of the Eastern Question might be appropriate to analyse, especially the First World War and the founding of modern Turkey in 1923. This short study by no means precludes the discussion developing to include them in a fuller portrait of the subject. Mine is an invitation to begin the conversation, not exhaust it.

The Greek War of Independence and the troubled romance of European revolution

The Greek War of Independence of the 1820s was the first major episode in the nineteenth century in which the Eastern Question figured prominently in the experiences of a significant number of European states, especially the Great Powers (Chapman, 1998: 54−6). The other name for this conflict, the 'Greek Revolution', is an apt description based upon the involvement of those other than the original belligerents, the Greeks and their Ottoman rulers, as much of the impetus for their participation was to aid in what was seen as a just revolution by a distinct and historic people against a foreign, tyrannical overlord.

Moreover, in the eyes of a Frenchman, or a Russian, or an Englishman, the Greek revolutionaries not only had a philosophical right to rebel, but there were two factors that linked Greece with their experiences. First, Greeks were Christian and thus occupied the all-important designation of 'Christendom', that elastic category that was set in diametric opposition to the Muslim Ottoman Empire for centuries previously (St Clair, 1972: 195−204). Second, the Greek nationalists were considered by many to be the direct heirs to ancient Greek civilization and, given the emphasis on the classics − the arts, philosophy and modern theology − in Western education, the chance of self-determination for the inheritors of such an illustrious history was espoused by these 'philhellenes' as reason enough to offer political and military support to the revolt (see Roessel, 2002: 42−71). On both considerations, Muslim Ottomans in this equation were external forces in the eyes of the pro-Greek groups across Europe, as they were patently non-Christian and considered to be of a distantly geographic origin unconnected with the Greek past. Pro-Greeks hence despised the Ottoman Empire as land ruled by opulent, barbaric despots.

The brotherhood with the Greek revolutionaries pro-Greeks posited brought people from various countries into closer contact with one another via the medium of intellectual exchange, the various forms of public discourse in European countries (the press, political and religious authorities, prominent cultural figures) and, in an actual sense, as volunteers joined the fight from a variety of Europe's states. Within the first few years of the war, there was a German Legion (St Clair, 1972: 119−26), an influential pro-intervention contingent of liberal Russians (Prousis, 1994: 26−35), a French attempt at a military expedition, and a powerful pro-Greek lobbying group in London, the London Greek Committee. The British poet Lord Byron and other internationally famous figures like the French painter Eugène Delacroix popularized a pro-Greek stance, while accounts of atrocities against Greeks (especially the infamous massacre of around 20,000 Greek civilians on the island of Chios) created an uproar across Europe when reported in the increasingly influential press (Bass, 2008: 67−75).

Across the oft-fought-over borders of the European states, there coalesced a significant group that considered it clear that the Greek cause was just, with this sentiment linking together peoples, like the French and the English, who had held deep antagonisms for one another in the not-so-distant past. These hatreds were set aside in relation to the Greek War of Independence, as a Romantic opinion existed that Europeans' common heritage could be traced actually or spiritually to ancient Greece – 'We are all Greeks', as Byron's compatriot Percy Shelley said in 1821. Considering that the war coincided with a new move by European powers to expand their influence globally, and the non-Christian, 'despotic' Ottoman constituted one of the archetypal 'others' to oppose in this quest, the notion of a Christian, brotherly Europe was a logical product of popular support for the Greek cause and popular animosity toward the Turk (Meyer, 1991: 661). These cultural ideas certainly operated prior to the war (see Wallace, 1997), but the war helped bring these groups together in a substantive and effectual way, giving rise to a much more unitary feeling among the populace of the various European states than had been possible previously (see Kipperman, 1991; Morris, 2000: 226−7). At the same time, the Ottoman Empire, always occupying at best a liminal location in Europe, provided a people and a territory against which a connected and contiguous European society could define itself.

Much of the above is, to be sure, well known, and has been commented on at length (especially, Bass, 2008: 45−151; Dakin, 1973: 107−20; Pizanias, 2011; St Clair, 1972). But if we expressly examine the response to the war in relation to the *Eastern Question* − one of the key issues of the period − we can see that the shift towards a Romantic understanding of a European community united by a common goal ran up against and challenged other powerful existing conceptions of what Europe was, with some interesting and thought-provoking effects. Specifically, the Greek War of Independence obviously weakened the Ottoman Empire, marking a place in its decline and its instability as a regional power, the very subject of so much of European politics at this time. For as powerful a *popular* feeling as support for the Greek cause was, Greek independence threatened the strategic plans of individual European empires and states made by their respective *authorities*.

Speeding up the pace of Ottoman decline was inconvenient for most of the European powers, as many, especially Britain and France, relied upon a reasonably secure Ottoman

Empire as both a source of trade and a bulwark against other powers, like Russia, entering the Mediterranean to threaten their interests (Bass, 2008: 48; St Clair, 1972: 134). Even Russia, the emblem of Orthodoxy in European politics, hesitated in extending official support to the Greeks until after the stability-obsessed Emperor Alexander I died and was replaced by his brother Nicholas in 1825 (Bitis, 2006: 149−88). In Alexander's mind, such an action would both weaken peace among the European powers and threaten Russian society's own adherence to authority, as to give in to those Russian liberals who preached intervention would show that the power of the emperor could be subverted by the body politic (Blanning, 1994: 705; Prousis, 1994: 29−30, 52−5). Nicholas, though no less conservative than his brother, appears to have seen war with the Ottomans as preferable to allowing Russia's non-intervention to bolster popular dissent to the monarchy (Bitis, 2006: 378−425). Nevertheless, when France, Britain and Russia did eventually intervene, striking the decisive blow against the Ottomans at the Battle of Navarino in 1827, it was after *years* of discussion amongst authority figures regarding the intelligence of threatening global stability and their respective domestic concerns by injuring the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, Britain's Tory Prime Minister and hero of the Napoleonic Wars, the Duke of Wellington, called the battle 'an untoward event', even while the populace largely cheered the action (Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 1989: 109). The political and cultural dynamics of other countries were similar to Britain's: popular support, governmental anxiety (Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 1989: 109).

It is suggestive here that tying together the various and often antagonistic European states around a 'just cause', a Christian community, and a spiritual connection with the ancient past implied a rejection of certain values held by the governing authorities of each country – or at least put pressure on them to heed popular demand. This impulse obviously proceeded from Europe's longer and broader history of conflict between society and state, progress and tradition. For example, Austria-Hungary's Foreign Minister from 1809 to 1848, Klemens von Metternich, was famously anti-liberal, and he fought to defeat the Greek uprising as he would fight any other group that would attempt to break away from a reigning power (Bass, 2008: 117−22). For Metternich, Ottoman decline provided European liberals with an opportunity to advance their cause by proxy, which was a greater risk to Austria than a strong Ottoman Empire. Perhaps the eventual success of Greek independence and broader liberal movements shows that people like Metternich worked against the grain, but his opinions cannot be divorced from the full scope of European thought: that is, *both* support and rejection of revolution are quintessentially European ways of thinking, with any expression of this conflict offering a space for 'Europe' to appear in fuller relief.

The Greek War of Independence appears to have offered a perfect venue for this ideological conflict to be presented as a referendum on what Europe was. Greece became part of Europe more fully after Greek problems became, as David Rodogno (2012: 88) puts it, 'internationalized', thus pulling the country and its people out of the Ottoman sphere and into the European one. Further, given that this was the first uprising in the Ottoman domain that Europeans really cared about, it is particularly suggestive in light of the question of *where* Europe is. Certainly the West's Romantic ideal was more clearly portrayed by the Greek uprising than, for example, the one in Serbia, whose own breakaway from the Ottoman Empire in 1817 had barely registered as a European cultural event (Jelavich,

1983: 203−4). If Lord Byron may be assumed to represent something of that era's *Zeitgeist*, the Greek cause and all it 'meant' was far more appealing to the European mind than any prior Ottoman uprising. Nothing moved him or any of his sort to pack up and head for Belgrade, but a Greece again able to pursue its age-old destiny, at last free from the backward Muslim interloper – there was something worth fighting for! Indeed, Shelley's maxim would have made much less sense had it been rendered as 'We are all Serbians.' For most people, Greece was a thing in itself; it was something that mattered to Europe. Serbia was just another tiny, puzzling piece of the problem of Ottoman decline.

In these ways, looking at the Greek War of Independence through the lens of the Eastern Question offers a new way of understanding this key ideological conflict in modern European society and politics. The constant consideration of the consequences of Ottoman decline acted in guiding, moderating or even counteracting popular input to the actual policies undertaken by European states towards Eastern events. The Eastern Question therefore gives us a more precise insight into how the contested category of international revolution came to define European thought, the standards and boundaries of the European locale, and the nature of European ideals. More than anything, it shows us that if we have not considered the Eastern Question in our reflection on either the Greek instance or the European totality, we may have overlooked something essential to what 'Europe' has come to mean.

The Crimean War and the political union of Europe

Often remembered as the first 'modern' war, the Crimean War was also a major phase in the timeline of the Eastern Question. Fought between 1853 and 1856, the war pitted Russia against an alliance of the Ottomans, France, Britain and Sardinia. The source of the conflict centred on who held authority over the protection of Ottoman Christians and more generally the integrity of the Ottoman Empire (Figes, 2010: 432−3). Since the 1774 Treaty of Küchuk-Kainardji, Russia had claimed an exclusive right to oversee the interests of Ottoman Christians, especially in terms of protecting and representing Orthodox clergy (Curtiss, 1979: 41). However, the treaty's wording regarding this right was 'ambiguous and easily distorted' depending on the translation (Figes, 2010: 7). Thus when Napoleon III asserted France's claim to the same right in 1851 and received a favourable sanction from the Sultan, Russia felt the 1774 treaty had been violated, while the Ottoman Empire (and France) felt comfortable arguing that it had not. From there the situation devolved, war commenced, and after three bloody years Russia was defeated. Beyond the Crimean War's centrality in the narrative of the Eastern Question, the war may also have helped bring to prominence a key aspect of the modern ideal of a 'united Europe' and the attendant considerations of its geography.

It is important here to avoid assuming that the Eastern Question is in all ways a story of the Great Powers' attempts to absorb Ottoman lands. To be fair, from a realpolitik angle none of the parties involved in the Eastern Question really desired a general Ottoman collapse (Hanioğlu, 2008: 207−8). When Russian Emperor Nicholas I famously said in 1853 that the Ottoman Empire was a 'sick man' and would soon die, he did not, as some scholars assume (see Polunov, 2005: 83), necessarily pronounce the prognosis with relish (Riasanovsky, 2000: 337−8; Curtiss, 1979: 67−8). Rather, Russian policy

since the end of the Napoleonic Wars had been that the Ottoman Empire's collapse was imminent but potentially manageable, so long as *all* the Great Powers acted in league (Lincoln, 1978: 222−3). This meshed with the principles of the 'Concert' system of international affairs, whose form was set by the resolution of the Napoleonic Wars at the 1815 Congress of Vienna and which held that equilibrium among Europe's Great Powers ensured peace (Schroeder, 1994: vii, 575−82).

Thus Paul Schroeder (1972: 421−2) is right that the war was tantamount to the 'destruction' of the Concert. However, out of the destruction came the reaffirmation of the core elements of the previous order combined with a revised map of European politics. As Michael Geyer and Charles Bright (2006: 240) argue, prior to 1853 the balance of powers was not a 'self-sustaining system' but was actually 'under the tutelary control' of the two powers that had the greatest Eurasian ambitions, Russia and Britain. It was only when Russia was pushed out of a central position in the Concert at the 1856 Congress of Paris, which concluded the Crimean War, that Britain became the only Concert member with both a global reach and the benefit of having sought to protect Europe's status quo (Schroeder, 1972: 427). Russia's loss thus showed that mere power was not enough to ensure respect and authority in the Concert (Geyer and Bright, 2006: 240−41). Moreover, behaviour towards the Concert *itself* now indicated the commitment of a state or its agents to a definition of Europe as a place united by its unanimous aversion to internal conflict. The idea that a power could be 'for' Europe if for stability and 'against' it if contributing to instability was something of an innovation. Until 1815 there had been no explicit agreement – no model – that Europe *had* to be, as a whole, a place defined by peaceful relations. Between 1815 and the Crimean War the connection between state interrelations and the concept of 'Europe' remained opaque; the ideas underpinning it did not come under enough stress to force a verdict. After the war, however, a state that offended the precept of European stability for personal gain no longer just acted selfishly vis-à-vis its counterparts in the state system, but acted in an anti-*European* way – whereas a state which promoted stability acted in a pro-*European* way. All countries that were deemed in Europe now had a clearer relationship to another, more theoretical Europe.

There followed the implication that Europe could expand or retract based on a state's adherence to this principle, in the former case to encompass the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire had always been the external force in Europe's consideration of Eastern matters; the Eastern Question was a European issue, even though it concerned Ottoman decline. Thus it is intriguing that having won the war alongside Concert members, the Ottoman Empire was supposed to be rewarded by '[sharing] in the advantages of the European concert' (quoted in Anderson, 1996: 143). In a sense, the Ottoman Empire was to become a sort of sixth European Great Power, on probationary status until it had enacted structural reforms of its government, economy, military and diplomatic apparatus (Hurewitz, 1961). Ironically, after being the very emblem for hundreds of years of what was non-European, non-Western and foreign, the Ottoman Empire was to be, theoretically, embraced into the European fold by the same societies that had formulated that belief! It may be that the very *systemization* of European international politics made it possible for the European powers as a group to countenance such a drastic shift in the understanding of what being a part of Europe meant. It was no longer essential that a European state was part of 'Christendom' or 'the West', but that it adhered to certain

rules of modern politics and, more than anything, promoted the totem of European peace. As one might expect, though, for the existing members of the Concert the conduct of their new colleague was still viewed through the prism of Ottoman disability, turning the Ottomans' passage into Europe into an opportunity for their new friends to accelerate and deepen intervention in Ottoman affairs (Badem, 2010: 287−8, 403; Kaya and Tecmen, 2011: 16).

In terms of Russia, on the other hand, Europe retracted following the war. Whereas the Sultan was welcomed into the European fold with the award of symbols of its European allies − from the literal, like the Order of the Garter and the Légion d'honneur, to the figurative, like Westernized dress and technology and the pressure to adopt principles like religious toleration (Figes, 2010: 425−6) − Russia drifted east, its erstwhile colleagues concluding that it had proved itself finally and without a doubt a 'semi-Asiatic state' whose main concerns were ipso facto non-European (Figes, 2010: 442). Russia had moreover lost its reputation as Europe's representative power *in* the East – the one that saw to Europe's needs by exerting influence there (Yasamee, 2011: 65−6). Although the Crimean War had been called by Russia 'Восточная война', or the 'Eastern War', it was Russia that ended up as the negative Eastern power in the dispute.

This view contradicted Russia's efforts to present itself as a fully European country – despite its own misgivings about this quest (see Hartley, 1992) – by focusing attention on its role in the European state system. Since 1815 Russia's leadership had depicted their country as an advocate of European equilibrium and Europe's arbiter in disputes (Schroeder, 1994: 478, 520). Of course, Europe's liberals opposed an authoritarian Russia acting as Europe's judge or 'gendarme'. For this reason some scholars, such as Martin Malia (1999: 85−159), have argued that from 1815 to 1853 the dominant view of Russia in European eyes was progressively that of an 'Oriental despot', enforcing political inertia for illiberal, reactionary causes. True, as liberalism gained wider credibility and legitimacy in European society, Russia's 'policeman' identity helped bring about this distrust of its motives vis-à-vis the Concert (Polunov, 2005: 80). And, to be sure, Russia's insistence on reaction in a time of greater and greater reform put it out of step with the overall trend in European society – an impression of regress that the exposure of Russia's military and economic inadequacy in the Crimean War only confirmed (Fuller, 1992: 252−64).

When it comes to the Eastern Question, however, the shape of Russia's role in Europe is not so easily rendered. If, as the Concert agreed, the Ottoman Empire had to be kept from disintegrating totally so as to ensure European peace, Russia had until the Crimean War been mostly successful at presenting itself as agreeable to this policy (Haas, 2005: 75−90). It was at least, as Schroeder (1994: 256) quips, 'not in a hurry' to gain at the Ottomans' expense. It was only when Russia abandoned the conventional policy on the Eastern Question in the prosecution of its personal claims and ambitions, thus risking a wider European conflict, that Russia's reactionism was proved obsolete and its military, economic and political 'backwardness' vis-à-vis the rest of Europe fully recognized, not least by Russia itself (Figes, 2010: 443; Fuller, 1992: 273−4). Hence if we assume that all of Europe held a generally negative view of Russia's obstinacy towards development and reform prior to this, we might be looking at the problem from the viewpoint of the eventual triumph of European liberalism, or merely from the perspective of European powers that had more prominent liberal forces in this period, like France and Britain (see

Haas, 2005: 85−7). A more convincing explanation is that the growing prominence of liberal discourse *combined* with the spectacle of the Crimean War to bring Russia's 'Oriental' shape into full relief. Indeed, even those European powers that held similar interests in tradition and reaction to Russia (like Prussia, Austria-Hungary and Britain's Tory/aristocratic establishment) could no longer defend it by wielding the emblem of European stability (Polunov, 2005: 84).

It would be improper, though, to say that the Crimean War rendered Russia 'less European'. Russia's ambitions towards and commitments in the Caucasus and east of the Urals may have served as the post-Crimean face of its foreign policy (Figes, 2010: 452−3; Seton-Watson, 1952: 82), but it did not suddenly stop being an indispensable feature of the European space and the European mind. Instead, the definition of what 'Europe' stood for as a political concept changed to a degree that it began to exclude Russia, and even though Russia had a part in the birth of this definition, it was left behind by the other definers. We still feel this legacy today, as we continue to struggle with the paradox that Russia has both a role *in* and a relationship *to* Europe. This discourse is garbled to say the least. One often hears the old quasi-Orientalist stipulation, 'Well, Russia is European in some ways and not in others' – an expression that constitutes the logic beyond Russia's special place as a 'swing civilization' in Samuel Huntington's (1996) 'clash of civilizations' thesis. Indeed, the same kinds of things are often said about Turkey and, in retrospect, about the Ottoman Empire. Such discussions are usually not very productive, as they are prone to circle back on themselves and rely too often on seeing the problem as an exotic, unanswerable riddle. It is significant that one rarely hears mention of the Eastern Question among the clichés. A closer consideration of it might therefore impart to the subject some clarity and reason.

The Eastern Crisis of 1875−8 and the 'rational' construction of Europe

On Europe's conflicted response to the Balkan Wars of the 1990s, Étienne Balibar recently wrote that, 'on the one hand, the Balkans are part of Europe and, on the other hand, they are not. Apparently we are not ready to leave this contradiction behind' (2004, 4). This same phrase with little alteration could be said in reference to the results of the Eastern Crisis of 1875−8, a subject that has not received nearly enough attention in the last few generations of scholarship.

We speak often of 'tracing the roots' of territorial and ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, Turkey and the Caucasus. In the West there has been the unhelpful influence of an idea that these conflicts are ancient and immutable, especially in the Balkans, the site of divisions that are seen to be a 'centuries old ... problem from hell', as US Secretary of State Warren Christopher (1993) famously said of Bosnia. It is a tragedy on a number of levels that it is considered politically, and indeed commercially, more marketable to treat these problems as 'obscure and unfathomable', in the careless assessment of the journalist Robert Kaplan (1993: 70), rather than as something rooted in the precise circumstances of modern nationalism and the international politics of Europe. For as much as the Balkans, Turkey, and the Caucasus, like Russia, occupy an 'internally

external' location in the European imagination (see Todorova, 1997; Wolff, 1994), they are indeed totally and utterly a part of Europe. These areas have been key participants in the construction of Europe as the modern rational entity, as a bounded place and idea, it is within modern discourse. Europe as it is today would not exist without these nebulous locations and without influential historical scenes like the Eastern Crisis of 1875−8.

What, then, was the Eastern Crisis, and why does it matter to the idea and place of 'Europe'? A brief timeline: in 1875 Christians in Herzegovina rose against the Ottoman authorities, sparking support from Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria. In 1876 the Ottomans suppressed the Bulgarian uprising by the destruction of the area the uprisers operated in, resulting in over 12,000 deaths. These 'Bulgarian Atrocities' led to a wave of indignation in Europe against the Ottoman government, including Britain, where a public pressure movement arose calling for the country to voice its support for the Bulgarians (Bass, 2008: 256−65). Russia soon declared war on the Ottoman Empire, and after a short, bloody campaign the Ottomans signed the 1878 Treaty of San Stefano, which all but ended Ottoman power in the Balkans, chiefly through the proposal of an enormous Bulgarian state. The rest of the Concert saw this treaty as threatening the status quo, and so a conference was convened in Berlin where a new treaty made the following provisions significant to our discussion: first, part of the proposed 'Big Bulgaria' would become an autonomous principality, part (known as Eastern Rumelia) would be organized as an autonomous province (*vilâyet*), and part remained in Ottoman hands under the jurisdiction of the *vilâyets* of Edirne and Salonica; second, Serbian, Romanian and Montenegrin independence was affirmed and Austria occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina; third, it was acknowledged (though not explicitly stated) that Britain would oversee Ottoman Cyprus, while Russia was given some control in the Danube and the Caucasus and affirmed in the right to keep a navy in the Black Sea. The Ottoman Empire maintained its authority everywhere else, although, crucially, it was generally agreed that it had failed to achieve the status of a European Great Power (Yasamee, 2011: 59).

The Treaty of Berlin provided the basis for the territorial makeup of the modern Balkans and to some degree modern Turkey. Of course, borders have changed: Macedonia and Albania were not on the 1878 map, while Greece would later extend farther north and Serbia and Bulgaria farther south. Yet the reference system for these changes remains physically and imaginatively linked to 1878 (Yavuz, 2011: 27). For it was in 1878 that the Balkans were firmly recognized by the reigning European powers as being formed of a number of states (and potential states) with identifiable borders and frontiers, each with its own geographic and ethnic texture and a distinct national character. The legitimacy European society imparted to Balkan national movements during the Eastern Crisis proved it was no longer appropriate to have the Ottoman Empire serve as the overarching power in the region. Indeed, prior to the Crisis only Greece was *undeniably* sovereign. The only other Balkan states with real autonomy pre-1878, Serbia and Romania, now were recognized as lacking formal ties to the Ottomans. Montenegro's contested status was also resolved. As for Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former had not existed since the Ottoman conquest and the latter had never existed in a coherent form.

With the Ottoman authorities sent packing, all of these 'new' places appeared on the map in stark contrast to the vague, semi-externalized identity that centuries of Muslim, 'Asian' domination had implied. Suddenly, a more rigid character replaced the region's nebulous ancient/Ottoman form, imposing Europe's presumed ethnic and cultural dividing lines that, as we know, helped provide the source of the 'chaotic' identity they hold in the Western mind (see Blumi, 2003). In fact, as Isa Blumi (2011: 95−9) notes, the definition of the Balkans as a place of immortal ethnic conflict emerges out of the post-1878 period, with the pre-1878 period depicted in the nationalist overtones that eventually became pre-eminent. Not surprisingly, then, the Eastern Crisis and its results also appear to help explicate a portion of the current taxonomic struggles over where and what Europe is or should be. That is, the dynamics of nationalism and international politics that arose and, importantly, *crystallized* during the Eastern Crisis, combined with the borders designed by major European powers, deeply influenced what the term 'Europe' has come to mean when it is invoked to signify a specific global space. Without using too crude a lens, we might say that an important part of the foundation of Europe as a rational construction – as something that 'makes sense', that is geographically and culturally contiguous, that is abstract and flexible and yet has a number of certain players and non-players – is closely tied to the territorial conditions and discursive conventions set up by the European powers' 'solution' to the Eastern Crisis (and, they hoped, the Eastern Question).

It is further telling that the Congress of Berlin was insufficiently definitive – 'unfinished' – just like Europe is. The potential for a patchwork, nascently European Balkans was there, but under the agreement Greece remained a notional European enclave and Bosnia-Herzegovina was caught between its Austrian occupiers and its Ottoman sovereign (see Babuna, 2011). Bulgarians were torn between their anger at having been deprived of a larger state by the European Concert and their desire to be recognized as fully European (Kosseva et al., 2011). This problematic, unresolved geography both motivated the further excision of the Ottoman Empire and impacted on the way we have spoken about and considered the region since (Yavuz, 2011: 27−30). The Balkans continue to tip into and out of Europe, while Turkey remains in most cases a bridge too far. Strangely, though, for many the limits of Europe are understood to be self-evident. Indeed, France's former president Nicolas Sarkozy (2007a, 2007b) felt no dissonance in claiming that Turkey is simply 'not European' and does not have a 'natural right' to be in the EU, while at the same time working to support former Ottoman territories like Albania in achieving candidate status (Council of Ministers, Republic of Albania, 2009). The example of Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina (another former Ottoman, majority Muslim country that is a potential EU candidate), along with the obvious inclusion of more westerly Orthodox peoples v. the less clear possibility for inclusion of more easterly Orthodox Christian countries, makes the validity of the traditional category of Europe as extending to the boundaries of Christendom questionable at best. Perhaps the current haze surrounding this border zone of Europe cannot be dispelled without considering how the Balkans 'got in' and how the possibility of a European Ottoman Empire, with both its western and eastern regions, was ruled out.

Beyond the Balkans, the divestment of Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 remains intimately connected with Europe's ongoing Turkish dilemma, even

notwithstanding the issue of Northern Cyprus. Although the Republic of Cyprus generally belongs to the pro-EU wing of European politics, especially on security and foreign policy issues (Stefanou, 2005: 267), it has no place for Turkey in its conception of Europe and, it may be argued, has worked to block plans that would link together the resolution of the Cyprus dispute with paving the path to Turkish accession (see Faustmann, 2011). This antagonism obviously predates the island's division into an independent, ethnically Greek South and a Turkish puppet North. Indeed, the whole idea of Cyprus being European rests upon the same kind of sentiments regarding religion and culture we saw in the above discussion of the Greek War of Independence: Cyprus is European because it is part of the Greek world, and everyone knows that Europe would not be Europe were it not for Greece and Greeks. It is thus the 'eastern most [*sic*] bastion of European culture in the Mediterranean', as Cyprus is provocatively described in relation to its term as one-third of the EU Presidency (Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2012). Europe's Cyprus stronghold was liberated from Ottoman rule, and thus the yoke of non-European Muslims, in 1878, when it was embraced into the fold of the British Empire. British colonialism made it doubly European then, despite the irony that British control is seen by most Greek Cypriots as a further phase of external domination (Papadakis et al., 2006: 6; Varnava, 2009).

Yet it is not merely that certain forces or contentious matters block Turkey's entry into the EU. As Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (2006: 406−7) contends, arguments against Turkey being European are 'rooted differently and more deeply' in European culture and history than can be explained by typical political and economic issues. The unwillingness to accept Turkey into Europe in many ways follows the divides marked by the physical and intellectual line in the sand drawn in 1878, and redrawn since, over the factual limitations of what space might logically be called Europe and what might not, ever after, be European. If the structures of our language about this region and the criteria for Europeanness owe something of their shape to the Treaty of Berlin, we might ask: did Turkey lose its bid to join the EU in 1878? Indeed, not only is the deliberate avoidance of anything beyond the most recent past not very helpful for confronting the specific issue of Turkish accession, it is also unhelpful to the question of what Europe is, where it is, and what this means. It is suggestive that arguments against Turkey being European have a flavour of self-reference. Why is Turkey not European? Because it is not European. Why, then, is Cyprus (or Bulgaria, or Albania, or Moldova) European? Because it is European. Always the movement in these conversations is toward the indefinite, especially when logic is applied: those who stipulate supposedly hard-and-fast aspects of European v. non-European religion and culture are sure to abandon such rules, returning to the fog of equivocation, when challenged.

Of course, this tendency to uphold divisions between Europe and non-Europe by wilful circular reasoning leads to, as John Redmond (2007: 314) states, 'ill-defined and intangible' arguments, because the discussion is not usually structured on definitive and tangible bases. Instead, the mode of debate is one in which the acceptance of a single condition of one position obviates all the conditions of the other. Worse, as Sarkozy's comments show, when it comes to the question 'What is Europe?' one is likely to be rewarded for vague, easy answers that take into account as few historical complications as possible. Indeed, by avoiding the Eastern Question's effect – whether in terms of the

Ottoman demise itself or the way the demise was processed in European society – on the shape, dynamics and identity of modern Europe, one makes it much easier to define 'Europe'. It removes an element of the European story that is reliably confounding. And without such factors of confusion, we will always be left with the disappointing, and supremely tautological, conclusion that what Europe is, is Europe.

Conclusion

The Eastern Question and its major 'crises', three of which I have very briefly examined, had clear and lasting effects on the idea and physical shape of Europe. Of course, I am not arguing that the Eastern Question and Ottoman decline are the *only* or even the primary things that determined the shape of Europe as concept and place. But they are too rarely considered, or have been looked at piecemeal without a longer view of change over time and the important themes they display that are relevant to today's problems.

We also need things like the Eastern Question to help identify the value judgements we use in contemplating Europe – a pursuit promoted by Michelle Tusan (2010) in relation to the Eastern Question and British history. More broadly, Ursula Keller (2004: 4−5) has written that the goal of identifying what Europe is or stands for might be made easier by the fact that Europe has become painfully aware of its 'worst self'. In '[coming] to know itself', she says, Europe's 'brilliant intellectual, cultural, and social achievements' stand in stark contrast to 'the darkest excesses of destruction and self-depredation' (Keller, 2004: 5). Keller's optimism is comforting, but there remains a disquieting echo of the idea that Europe's 'achievements' should be measured against an assumed lack of development of the non-European (and non-Western) space. One need only look at works like Niall Ferguson's 2011 book, *Civilization: The West and the Rest*, to see that this way of thinking remains popular. In this formulation Europe exists in an exceptionalist state, with non-European things held at arm's length, turned in the hand, held up to the light, and judged as something whose nature Europe regards rather than possesses. Yet the Eastern Question shows that Europe's identity is wrapped up so tightly in the supposedly external that any honest assessment of that identity *depends* on notionally non-European elements. Confusingly, the answer to the question 'What is Europe?' might in part be 'Europe is not-Europe'.

Even the idea of a Europe that is capable of expansion –in terms of both distance and definition – seems laden with theories and tropes popular during the era of the Eastern Question. In my work I am regularly left questioning how much we have really progressed from the thought processes of that time. I often reflect on a remarkable conversation I had in late 2006. At a lecture, I asked a Greek specialist on the EU and EC law what he thought of then soon-to-be EU members Bulgaria and Romania and their identity as part of Europe and as Europeans. Could they 'become European', in the eyes of the other members? He replied with total equanimity that 'these countries are like children', they will not grow up for a while, and that the farther east one goes the more that is the case. This is the *same* kind of language I have seen in nineteenth-century texts about the *same* places in the context of specific discussions of the Eastern Question: primitive, childlike places that need the guiding and disciplining hand of more experienced powers. I therefore wonder if a deeper contemplation of the long and influential history of the Eastern

Question in European and global politics would be illuminating as to how such a feeling can persist even among the most learned and conscientious of people.

Acknowledgements

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