
Sovereignty

ORGANIZED HYPOCRISY

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or in Turkey in Asia, shall enjoy the same rights, advantages, and privileges. . . . The rights possessed by France are expressly reserved, and it is well understood that no alterations can be made in the status quo in the Holy Places.²⁷

The Porte also agreed to implement reforms related to the Armenians and to “guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds.” Turkey was to inform the powers of the steps it had taken and the powers would “superintend their application.” The Ottomans made this pledge to secure the withdrawal of Russian forces from Armenian territory.²⁸

These provisions of the Treaty of Berlin were entirely consistent with existing European practices even though they were inconsistent with the Westphalian model. The enumeration of rights for religious minorities, especially when territory changed hands, as was the case in the creation of new states out of the Ottoman Empire, had become a routine part of European diplomacy after 1648. What was different about the Congress of Berlin was that the enumeration of minority rights was the result of intervention through coercion and imposition rather than invitation through contracting. The would-be rulers of Romania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Serbia were not, themselves, interested in religious toleration. They accepted these arrangements only because it was the only way that they could secure recognition as independent—or, in the case of Bulgaria, tributary—states. The Ottoman Empire agreed to protect the Armenians only to secure the removal of Russian troops from its territory, a clear example of imposition.

The major powers insisted on provisions for religious toleration primarily because they were concerned with international stability. The Balkans were a volatile area. Orthodox religious concerns had provided a pretext for Russian intervention and Russian intervention in the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire threatened British interests in the eastern Mediterranean. Austria-Hungary’s anxiety about Slavic nationalism prompted its demands for informal control of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 and formal incorporation in 1907. Bismarck was anxious to maintain Germany’s alliance with Austria-Hungary and Russia, which could be, and ultimately was, destroyed by conflict in the Balkans.

In addition there were what would now be labeled humanitarian concerns. British public opinion had been agitated by reports of Turkish atrocities against the Bulgarians; Gladstone’s popularization of this issue had helped to return him to the position of prime minister. Jewish groups in the United States and Great Britain pressured their governments to protest Romanian treatment of their coreligionists. Later in the century,

²⁷ Treaty of Berlin 1878, 996, Article LXII.

²⁸ Treaty of Berlin 1878, 996, Article LXI; Lewis 1995, 126; Marshall 1991, 75, 81; Macartney 1934, 167.